

## Introduction

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When setting out nearly a decade ago to collect and publish our first volume, *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture*, we sought to broaden the parameters of what then constituted “Asian American” as a scholarly category.<sup>1</sup> At the time, our argument was that Asian American studies should consider popular culture in its broadest scope, as we called for a multidisciplinary study of Asian American cultural productions as part of a complex conversation with American history, contemporary mainstream culture, and burgeoning digital technologies.

The study of popular culture within Asian American studies has since emerged as a rich, mature, and multifaceted field in which such approaches are hardly novel. Yet scholars must now contend with a media environment that has only grown denser, broader, faster, and more agile. Technologies of production, reception, and content delivery are yet again straining our conventional grasp of popular circulation. The proliferating avenues of media convergence force us to rearticulate the impact of media platforms on the creation of new audiences and textual meanings. The enduring allure of celebrity and the rapid rise and fall of popular trends have only intensified, and their fragmentation across media cultures challenge scholars to divine their significance in more complicated and multivalent ways.

In addition to the always-churning engine of global Hollywood, the increasing reach of an assembled transnational media culture and the growing production of global popular culture in Asia are also reshaping our models of locality, influence, and provenance. These changes have invited new possibilities for envisioning how popular culture and media forms work to simultaneously maintain and shift our understanding of Asian American identity beyond the tropes of immigrant and native. Evolving means of making, interacting with, and consuming media form a complex, even overwhelming, terrain. Trying to track the often ephemeral work of local community formations to share histories in the midst of political and social shifts means that scholars must travel global pathways as migration becomes an ever more formative experience for Asian American communities. It is in the midst of this fully networked and dynamic cultural moment that our current collection sets off to chart a global Asian American popular media culture.

Asian American popular culture is not only on Main Street—as the title of our first collection declared—but also at the crossroads of global and national expressions of culture intersecting with race, gender, class, and religion in multiple arenas of exchange, both cultural and commercial. While Asian Americans have been the subject and object of American popular culture for a long time, the accessibility of culture across national borders and the rapid circulation of cultural “flashpoints”—like K-pop viral YouTube sensation Psy; Jeremy Lin’s sudden, and brief, global superstardom; or the current American obsessions with Bollywood and ramen—offer new interesting pathways in conceiving how categories of “Asian” and “Asian American” exist in counterbalance and dependency within global popular culture. The growth in representation, attention, and media access to people of color and recent increases in the outward flow and hybridization of Asian cultural products such as Hallyu, transnational music and dance collaborations, food, gaming, and fashion all present new and expanded horizons for the study of Asian American popular culture in a global context.

Even in the midst of all this change—the rise of new social and media platforms in the early part of the twenty-first century and in the context of a supposed post-racial United States after the 2008 election of President Barack Obama—central questions remain constant in the meeting place of Asian American studies and media studies. How do we engage with culture? How do Asian Americans continue to influence the popular, and what are the limits and distinctions between mainstream and the margins? Asian American popular culture remains a crucial site for understanding how communities share information and how the meanings of mainstream are shaped with technology and inflected by historical representations and categories. Asian American popular culture is also at the crux of global and national trends in media studies because it crosses and collapses boundaries, acting as a lens with which to view the ebbs and flows of transnational influences on global and American cultures.

In *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*, we highlight new approaches to popular culture, both contemporary and historic, that address these global currents from a variety of perspectives. In this volume, we showcase the productive encounter of Asian American studies with the fields of American studies, anthropology, communications, film, history, media, music, literature, museum studies, television studies, sociology, and cultural studies. Speaking to the broadening of Asian American studies, the essays collected here certainly push on geographical and disciplinary borders but also press on conventions of foci and scale. In this, we stake out new approaches to the popular that account for emerging textual fields, global producers and technologies of distribution, transmedial circulation, and transnational mobility in the peripheries as well as in mainstream culture. These interdisciplinary works provide fresh insights to our current global

media moment and to Asian American studies as they pose new questions, draw surprising links, and offer fresh methods and possibilities.

*Global Asian American Popular Cultures* is divided into four parts—“Stars and Celebrities,” “Making Community,” “Wading in the Mainstream,” and “Migration and Transnational Popular Culture”—that organize the essays as a progressive broadening from individuals, to Asian American communities (physical or virtual), to the U.S. mainstream, and to global-scale exchanges. The connections and overlaps between the articles also suggest the necessity of reaching beyond these categories and for presenting a critical perspective that defines Asian American culture—through texts, producers, celebrities, media forms, or audiences—as active, complex, and productively contradictory. In total, *Global Asian American Popular Cultures* offers a select sampling of the best of contemporary Asian American studies but, more important, also signals the field’s ongoing collaboration with cultural, media, American, and global studies.

### Part I: Stars and Celebrities

As Richard Dyer argues in one of the earliest theoretical analyses of celebrity, stardom is an ideological phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> A celebrity is hardly the sum of an individual’s accomplishments; rather, a celebrity must be understood in terms of his or her cultural role. The chapters in Part I take as their focus specific individual stars and celebrities but place their fame within a larger social and historical context to examine what cultural shifts are marked by their rise to stardom, what needs or issues they activate, and how they engage, maintain, or challenge ideological formations. These stars illuminate the structural role of the Asian American public figure in marking the divisions between and among racial, gender, national, and class categories.

While mainstream U.S. media might be more commonly characterized as absent of Asian American stars, this conception of the media landscape evidences a historical amnesia and a narrow vision of what constitutes celebrity. Daisuke Miyao and Hye Seung Chung have written about the early film stardom of Sessue Hayakawa and Philip Ahn,<sup>3</sup> and the original “Dragon Lady” Anna May Wong is almost a cottage industry in academic film history. These early film stars as well as midcentury actors are continually rediscovered by Asian American scholars to remind us of our long, if willfully forgotten, history of contributing to U.S. cultural life. The chapters here include historical figures, but they also make claims to a wide diversity of contemporary celebrity icons. Drawing from sports, publishing, the art world, and video blogs, these authors, like commodity culture more generally, do not discriminate between high and low culture or mainstream and underground celebrity. Instead, they discover how and why certain Asian Americans have gained iconic status in each distinct milieu.

As the field of Asian American studies has increasingly emphasized transnationality as a category of analysis, so, too, have studies of Asian American stars begun to trace their paths across national boundaries. In “Trans-Pacific Flows: Globalization and Hybridity in Bruce Lee’s Hong Kong Films,” Daryl Joji Maeda returns to the most-written-about Asian American star in history. As most of his fans know, Bruce Lee participated in both the Hollywood and Hong Kong entertainment industry. Maeda, however, argues that Lee’s transnationality extends beyond his personal biography or the narrative content of his films. By reading the fight scenes in tandem with both biography and narrative, Maeda develops a kinetic analysis of Lee’s three Hong Kong films. In each film, the style of fighting responds to Lee’s rejection of the strict nationalism of traditional martial arts forms in favor of a progressively more hybrid style. Constancio Arnaldo continues this line of inquiry, albeit with a different methodological approach, in his chapter “‘I’m Thankful for Manny’: Manny Pacquiao, Pugilistic Nationalism, and the Filipina/o Body.” Like Maeda, Arnaldo studies how audiences negotiate diasporic identity through performance spaces and through the physical and masculine body, in this instance the body of Filipino American boxer Manny Pacquiao. Arnaldo reads the gatherings for Pacquiao’s fights as ritualized spaces where Filipina/o Americans combine sporting competitions with performances of what it means to be Filipina/o and American. Pacquiao’s body becomes a meeting point for narratives of masculinity, colonial history, and the powerful yet vulnerable racialized body.

As Lee’s and Pacquiao’s fame demonstrate, popular representations of Asian American masculinity, while certainly plagued by stereotypes of passivity and asexuality, have also made room for alternative performances of gender. The chapters by Celine Parreñas Shimizu and Julia Lee bring us additional lenses for understanding the imbrications of race and gender in the making of Asian American celebrity. Shimizu’s “A History of Race and He(te)rosexuality in the Movies: James Shigeta’s Asian American Male Stardom” takes up the unlikely film career of James Shigeta. His multiple roles in the 1950s as a romantic hero contradict the common lament about the negation of Asian American masculinity in Hollywood film. She reads three of his films—*Walk like a Dragon*, *Flower Drum Song*, and *Bridge to the Sun*—to argue for the transformative effects of Shigeta’s star power and acting ability. In contrast, Amy Chua’s celebrity persona, which Julia Lee explores in “Model Maternity: Amy Chua and Asian American Motherhood,” may break away from the hypersexualized image of Asian American femininity but replaces it with an equally damaging vision of racialized motherhood. While seeming to be a critique of “Western” motherhood, Chua turns Asian American motherhood, or the “tiger mother” image, into a commodity. This commodified ethnicity builds the cultural capital of Asian Americans through an embrace of a neoliberal vision of racial/ethnic identity.

In the process, Chua differentiates between the “bad” too-Chinese Asian American mother and the “good” upwardly mobile one that commodifies and exploits her difference.

The last two essays look toward the possibilities offered by a new generation of Asian American stars who traverse the traditional barriers of technology, media, and racial identification. These are not conventional stars garnering mainstream media hype; they are celebrities within their own subcultures. Like those more familiar stars, they act out the anxieties and dreams of their fans, managing the contradictions inherent in all ideologies. For many Asian Americans, Kevin Wu is the undisputed star of YouTube. In “YouTube Made the TV Star: KevJumba’s Star Appearance on *The Amazing Race 17*,” Vincent Pham and Kent Ono trace Wu’s movement between his extremely successful video blog to his appearance on reality television to understand the impact of social media and Internet content on the overall condition of Asian Americans. The essay examines Wu’s online success to argue that Asian American media convergence of mainstream and online fame risks falling into traditional model minority representations. However, by moving back and forth between his television and YouTube audience, Wu’s persona minimizes mainstream media’s impact on Asian American representation while still adding to his celebrity capital and retaining his agency over his own online stardom. The section concludes with the controversial figure of “outsider” artist David Choe. Wendy Sung reads the “street” art of David Choe as a problematic response to dominant white and Asian American figurations of the Los Angeles riots in “David Choe’s ‘KOREANS GONE BAD’: The LA Riots, Comparative Racialization, and Branding a Politics of Deviance.” Sung illustrates how Choe rejects the black aggressor versus Asian capitalist exploiter storyline of the mainstream press *and* the *sai-e-gu* Asian American victim identity. Instead, Choe’s stories of growing up and living in a mixed African American/Asian American community are set alongside stories of black/Asian antagonism. Further, Choe’s celebrity persona of macho misogyny functions as an art market branding and a refusal of the politics of respectability—a politics tied to a victim identity and the rhetoric of an idealized racial solidarity. The questions raised by these celebrity-centered studies, about the reverberations of trauma and the ongoing struggle over identity, representation, and community, also occupy the authors included in the next section of the book but scale both up and down from individual to group identity and from fandom to self-defined localities of place and shared experience.

## Part II: Making Community

Part I of this collection explores the individual and the exceptional; Part II moves in the opposite direction, toward shared identities formed along national and

ethnic lines. If, as we argue in the first section, the star/celebrity facilitates ideology by smoothing over social contradictions and projecting an idealized version of the self, then the chapters in Part II ask how those ideologies might be resisted or reshaped through community identities and histories. The authors examine a variety of forms, from the soundscapes of music and radio, to the exploding possibilities of the Internet, to the unexpected subcultures of graphic novels in order to expand our notions of what it takes to create and maintain community.

While the larger turn toward a neoliberal ethic has permeated almost every facet of everyday life, the authors collected here document the continued importance of community identity and collective action in the face of persistent racism, xenophobia, and the lasting trauma of war. Asian Americans have also long been an integral part of the colorblind and bootstrapping rhetoric that holds Asian Americans up as symbols or models of the insignificance of race, the importance of individual effort in overcoming all obstacles, and the embrace of a neoliberal ethic of opportunity/prosperity. The authors here powerfully counter this narrative with their detailed look at the survival strategies of Asians in the United States. These include narrating a collective history in the face of a willful historical amnesia, using in-reach, lo-fi, and grassroots methods to create cultural identities, and manipulating brand culture to make racialized communities legible. Their creative approaches ask us to rethink how we create community now and in the future.

The first two chapters of “Making Community” investigate sound as the web that holds together a dispersed community. In “From the Mekong to the Merrimack and Back: The Transnational Terrains of Cambodian American Rap,” Cathy Schlund-Vials writes about the Cambodian American community and how their experiences of structural inequality from low-skilled or unskilled employment to state deportation are explored in hip-hop. These artists produce and perform critical rhymes about everyday life, racism, xenophobia, and the ongoing War on Terror. As Schlund-Vials writes, “Set against histories of war-driven dislocation and forced relocation, Cambodian American rap determinedly recollects, through lyrics and samples, . . . the Cambodian genocide and its refugee aftermath.” Focusing his analysis on production as well as content, Ahmed Afzal follows with an ethnographic study of community formation around the development of local radio. The chapter “‘You’ll Learn Much about Pakistanis from Listening to Radio’: Pakistani Radio Programming in Houston, Texas” contrasts two time periods, the 1970s–1990s and current radio. In the earlier period, characterized by non-profit community-based programming, radio worked to create a cohesive community for its upwardly mobile core audience. Program content emphasized nostalgia for the homeland and worked to bridge ethnic and national boundaries. By contrast, contemporary community radio, much more commercial and sponsored by local businesses, creates niche

audiences by addressing specific consumer identities through programming content that stresses difference. Ultimately, the chapter traces the intersection of commerce, culture, and changes in demographics and immigration patterns to understand the formation of diasporic communities.

Afzal argues that the widely dispersed Pakistani population in Houston necessitated the mediation of community through a technology that could reach a wide swath of the Houston suburban landscape. Likewise, the articles by Konrad Ng and Lori Kido Lopez examine the possibilities and limits of computer-mediated communication in building community and marking racialized identities across a scattered population. Ng, the director of the Smithsonian Institution's Asian Pacific American Center from 2011 to 2015, asks what happens to Asian American history and experience as museums move toward digitization. In "Online Asian American Popular Culture, Digitization, and Museums," he argues that digitization has allowed national museums to expand what legitimately counts as national history. Ng presents different examples of case studies of online exhibits such as a comic book rendering of the historical exhibit *I Want the Wide American Earth: An Asian Pacific American Story* and an exhibition of Korean taco food trucks featured in the *Smithsonian Asian-Latino Project*. These examples, as well as other exhibits, connect Asian American community, identity, and history to a national narrative while simultaneously redefining how we create, respond, and develop national narratives. Lopez, in contrast, analyzes Asian American food bloggers who have a much more ambivalent relationship to community identity. "Asian American Food Blogging as Racial Branding: Rewriting the Search for Authenticity" centers on the thriving phenomena of Asian American food blogging and points to the centrality of authenticity as a trope that is both upheld and deconstructed. Lopez finds bloggers' claims of authenticity deployed to legitimate ethnic identity for both authors and their recipes that, in turn, are used primarily as a means of capitalizing on a logic of racial branding. Yet, in the posts and writing that Lopez analyzes, authenticity claims are simultaneously destabilized by bloggers, as their writing often expresses dynamic, transnational identity formations and undermines notions of fixed correspondence between culinary origins, identity, and contemporary cooking practices.

The sensory pleasures of food also subtend the search for community identity we find in Timothy August's study of the graphic novel *Vietnamerica*. In "Picturing the Past: Drawing Together Vietnamese American Transnational History" August explores the generic possibilities of the graphic novel to write and visualize an alternative narrative of Vietnamese Americans. He closely reads the relationship of words to the image to decipher how *Vietnamerica* presents Vietnamese identity as a collective identity and history rather than an individual story. The broad structural and abstracted collective identity described in the book is paradoxically conveyed by an emphasis on the somatic experiences

(sound, smell, taste) of a Vietnamese identity. These distinct ways of understanding identity are made whole by the rendering of the protagonist's journey through the genre of the graphic novel.

### Part III: Wading in the Mainstream

From Asian American cultural production and articulations of identity and community we turn to the broader frame of definitions of Asian American life and experience within mainstream U.S. culture. The common stereotype of the easy assimilation of Asian model minorities into mainstream culture crumbles under the close scrutiny of these authors. The essays in Part III examine the various strategies and means by which Asian Americans negotiate mainstream presence, neither blending into a “post-racial” media landscape nor standing apart as abject outsiders. By focusing their analysis on Asian Americans and also recentring them from their engagement at the margins of film, television, music, and competition culture, the essays offer nuanced ways of rethinking representations of Asian Americans across media industries.

By grappling with the specific genre of each media form, the authors also ask to what extent cultural frames that define Asian Americans—and the works they produce—have changed in the recent past. Each generic form carries within it a historical, gendered, and geographically specific narrative of our national culture. In both adhering to generic rules in order to tell a legible story and by consciously adjusting and expanding on those generic conventions, these authors probe the boundaries of mainstream media productions from musicals and indie rock to science fiction, spelling bees, and cooking competitions.

Part III opens with Camilla Fojas's account of how the state of Hawaii has come to signify a friendly, multiracial paradise in the popular American imagination. “Paradise, Hawaiian Style: Tourist Films and the Mixed Race Utopias of U.S. Empire” focuses on the role of Hollywood cinemas, namely Elvis Presley's cycle of Hawaiian films of the late 1950s and early 1960s, in shaping the image of Hawai'i for the U.S. imaginary. As Fojas illustrates, the iconic “types” that emerge in these films come to stand in for mainland experiences of Hawai'i—the beach boy, the surfer, the playboy—and function not as hedonistic rebels but as representatives of American enterprising spirit. Fojas further shows how Hollywood and the domestic tourism industry worked together to shape the image of the new state along specific ideological lines as both a tourist destination and a new frontier for expansive economic opportunity, all in a site of racial harmony, contrasting with the racial unrest on the mainland. The next essay steers the conversation of island and mainland racial politics to representations of racial partnerships and interactions in the realm of outer space. In “Post-9/11 Global Migration in *Battlestar Galactica*,” Leilani Nishime examines inter- and intra-racial relationships in a global context through the interstellar science fiction

narrative. Exploring the popular and critically acclaimed sci-fi series *Battlestar Galactica*, Nishime joins other critics in finding this post-9/11 program a particularly rich text for the expression and fantasy resolution of contemporary social and political anxieties. However, while many critics found the show's image of global politics and thematically resonant wartime narrative progressive, Nishime finds that many such storylines are buttressed by troubling depictions of race, gender, and nationality for characters marked as Asian American women. As Nishime argues, both of the primary Asian American characters in the program enact distinctive narratives of assimilation that together work to dislocate global migration from its underpinnings in capital, labor, and politics, posing "successful" cultural citizenship as one achieved at the site of heterosexual domesticity that renounces all transnational attachments.

The next chapter turns from geographically centered narratives of belonging to racial ones taking up Asian Americans who travel and trouble the "middle" space between white and black racial definitions. Douglas Ishii's "Did You Think When I Opened My Mouth?: Asian American Indie Rock and the Middling Noise of Racialization" explores the idea of "middleness" as a framework to understand the ways in which Asian American indie rock productions and their politics are defined as they challenge the white/anti-black hierarchies of both popular music and indie culture. For Ishii, Asian American indie rock—a central site for negotiating creative labor—is also the locus for the exploration of "racializing capital" and the workings of commerce and agency in the music industry. The final two essays in Part III look to cultural spaces where Asians literally compete to assert their place in relation to the white mainstream. In light of South Asian domination of the National Spelling Bee competition, Shilpa Davé deconstructs the popularity and importance of the spelling bee for South Asian American communities and its implication and deployment in particular models of success in "Winning the Bee: South Asians, Spelling Bee Competitions, and American Racial Branding." As Davé illustrates, the spelling bee is at once a symbolic articulation of mainstream assimilation, a treasured expression of the American dream, and a counterpathway to academic prestige for immigrant children. The spelling bee reads as a cultural narrative about South Asian immigrants' community achievements and yet is also a site where South Asian Americans are celebrated as they embrace market-based and individualistic definitions of success. As Davé shows, competitive spelling bees function as a cultural ritual defined through a symbiotic logic that links South Asian American success to a narrowly delimited performance of identity and also provides an opportunity for redefining community engagements with mainstream expectations. In "The Blood Sport of Cooking: On Asian American Chefs and Television," Tasha Oren traces the histories of Asian American chefs on TV and the development of the television cooking competition from its Japanese origins to its adaptation and massive popularity in the United States. In pairing these two parallel and largely

unrelated TV histories, Oren argues that the specific and politically laden history of Asian American food and cooking practices produced discourses about culinary style, tradition, and individual biography. These narratives lend themselves particularly well to the televisual identity-based spectacle that forms the narrative conventions of cooking competitions. Further, as she argues, this logic is also at the heart of the current ascendance of Asian American celebrity chefs in U.S. gastroculture.

#### Part IV: Migration and Transnational Popular Culture

From anime to the K-pop sensation “Gangnam Style,” it is clear that the United States no longer has a stranglehold on global popular culture. While it may now be commonplace to recognize Asia as a major force and source of popular culture, what is less commonly noted or understood is how global culture circulates in multiple and unexpected patterns. Moving beyond the influence of U.S. culture industries on Asia or the popularity of trends originating in Asia, Part IV complicates the movement of culture across borders by emphasizing the ways popular culture is both hybrid and differentially valued within global and local hierarchies. The circulation of cultural narratives, music, and objects is not a neutral process but, as Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma suggest, an exchange that is determined and controlled by human and community agency.<sup>4</sup> The articles in this section transition from examining how cultural objects travel to also analyzing and identifying the linkages and structures in transnational and global movements and migrations such as labor, trade, and world economies of consumption. As many of the authors here reveal, the meanings of popular culture are fundamentally unstable and change as culture moves across national and local contexts.

Part IV opens by addressing the circulation of historical and popular touchstone cultural narratives in the twenty-first century, namely, the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Towers, the ascent of K-pop as a global phenomenon, and labor outsourcing in the technology industry. While cultural mobility is often described at the sensual sites of spectacle, sound, or taste, Madhavi Mallapragada’s article places an emphasis on the olfactory and shows how discourses over smell facilitate articulations of race, nationalism, immigration, and masculinity. “Curry as Code: Food, Race, and Technology” takes up smell as a racializing trope and a discursive locale from which to explore the representation of Indian immigrant information technology workers. Curry, as Mallapragada argues, “operates as a code—a metaphorical and covert form of representation” that casts Indian immigrants as foreign, unwelcome, and lingering. Negotiations over the shared space of the workplace kitchen thus become clashes over immigration, racialized labor, and cultural politics as curry is both code and a metaphor for the “Indian” body.

The complexities of representing the Indian and South Asian body as a gendered and raced other is further examined by Deepti Misri in “Bollywood’s 9/11: Terrorism and Muslim Masculinities in Popular Hindi Cinema.” Here Misri explores Indian cinema’s foray into post-9/11 narratives from the perspective of immigrant South Asians and South Asian Americans in the United States—a perspective all but absent in Hollywood and independents U.S. films. In her comparison of two popular Bollywood films, *New York* (2009) and *Kurbaan* (2009), Misri reframes discussions of the “good” and “bad” Muslim U.S. citizens in cinematic narrative as she questions the relationship between the state and the normative heterosexual family as the marker of good citizenship. Misri argues it is the failure of the traditional heterosexual family narrative that allows for a patriotic Muslim American story. These and other Bollywood films offer a contrasting historical and cultural narrative of 9/11 that reflect local and global consequences for South Asians and the South Asian diaspora. Cultural negotiations over identity and tradition turn to questions of authenticity and cultural adaptation in the movement from film to music. In “Hybrid Hallyu: The African American Music Tradition in K-Pop,” Crystal Anderson explores the inter-racial and inter-cultural influences that complicate national histories and notions of musical authenticity in Afro-Asian K-pop. Anderson traces the history of African Americans in Korean popular music and crossover traditions of hip-hop and rhythm and blues in the music of Psy and Big Mama to propose a counter model of cultural authenticity. This alternative definition of cultural alliance relies less on conventions of cultural identity, politics, or historical legacy and is instead predicated on shared aesthetics of musical form and expression.

The complex network of racial discourses and aesthetics in border-crossing texts is further examined by Linda Trinh Võ in “Transnational Beauty Circuits: Asian American Women, Technology, and Circle Contact Lenses.” In this chapter, Võ charts the growing global popularity of cosmetic contact lenses, their marketing, and their signification and popularity among Asian and Asian American young women. As the essay illustrates, this anime-inspired fashion trend links various spheres of global cultural production together: the historical circulation and cross pollination between US and Japanese animation traditions, the evolution of fashion styles as marks of authority and defiance by young women in Japan and Korea, and the harnessing of digital culture by young Asian American women and other minorities to counter their underrepresentation in mainstream commercial beauty culture.

Fashion, commercial circulation, and the virtual pathways between East and West also form the terrain for Christopher Patterson’s “Making Whales out of Peacocks: Virtual Fashion and Asian Female Factory Hands.” Yet here the author reconfigures notions of consumption, labor, and globalization by exploring how virtual shopping in the play worlds of the videogame intersect with the hard materiality of global labor and the politics of consumption, identity, and power.

Pairing the actual practice of character enhancement and in-game consumption with the geopolitical structures of the gaming industry and its labor divisions, Patterson dismantles the illusion of virtuality. As the essay demonstrates, games like *Guild Wars 2* and *Lord of the Rings Online* construct play environments that actively erase the sweatshops, classed labor practices, and conspicuous consumption that sustain and animate them.

In the final article, Robert Diaz discusses the circulation of cultural commodities and the movement of racialized bodies in narratives of the return to the homeland. He looks to queered homecoming stories to trouble the very notion of cultural authenticity rooted in geography and state politics. “Failed Returns: The Queer *Balibkayan* in R. Zamora Linmark’s *Leche* and Gil Portes’s *Miguel/Michelle*” sets conventional Filipino nationalist narratives against those of the queer Filipino American returnee, illustrating how the former support essentialist notions of patriotism and justify the exploitation of out-migration labor. As Diaz’s analysis reveals, investment in normative nationalist, gendered, and sexual identities undergirds these conventional narratives. In contrast, the “failure” of the returnees and their homecoming confront and speak back to the normalized practices of global labor migration, giving voice to the complexities of post-colonial histories and cultural circulations.

The essays collected here highlight the current diversity in subjects and approaches in research on global Asian American popular culture; together they present important routes for understanding how we make meanings with and through the various realms of the popular, as well as the stakes for Asian American representation and participation within an expanding and volatile media culture.

#### NOTES

- 1 Shilpa Davé, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha G. Oren, eds., *East Main Street: Asian American Popular Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2005).
- 2 Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: Psychology Press, 2004).
- 3 Daisuke Miyao, *Sessue Hayakawa: Silent Cinema and Transnational Stardom* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Hye Seung Chung, *Hollywood Asian: Philip Ahn and the Politics of Cross-Ethnic Performance* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006).
- 4 Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, “Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity,” *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 191–213.