

Lynn Fujiwara and Shireen Roshanravan (editors)
Asian American Feminism and Women of Color Politics
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Reviewed by Robin R. Wang, 2019

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Quote:

"It is a ground-breaking work that builds a robust and outspoken Asian American feminist conceptual framework and praxis with special attention to the complexities of Asian American feminist resistances, struggles, and self-creations."

In the absence of contemporary edited collections about Asian American feminisms, this book attempts to fill the void through a conceptual and epistemological approach. It is a ground-breaking work that builds a robust and outspoken Asian American feminist conceptual framework and praxis with special attention to the complexities of Asian American feminist resistances, struggles, and self-creations.

This volume consists of five sections with a total of twelve essays. Several probing questions set the tone for the book: "What theoretical interventions, resistant strategies, and epistemic shifts shape the field of Asian American feminisms? More specifically, how are these central concepts, theories, and praxical strategies in dialogue with the coalitional politics of Women of Color and US Third World feminisms? What tensions or disconnections push against and redefine or reimagine the possibilities for an Asian American feminist politics" (5)? These questions endeavor to leave readers with a more in-depth and broader perspective on "Asian American feminist politics as a conceptual lens, a praxical strategy for resistance and a nexus for Women of Color solidarity" (6).

Part 1, "Re-membering Our Present: Asian American Genealogies in the Emergence of Women of Color Formations," examines diverse genealogies to expand Asian Americans' feminist historical ground and methodology of remembering an anti-imperial, cross-racial, and anticapitalist coalitional consciousness. In "Intersectionality and Incommensurability: Third World Feminism and Asian Decolonization," Grace Kyungwon Hong offers a penetrating narrative on the role and representation of Asian women in the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA), formed in 1971. It illuminates the politics of difference and offers a way to grasp women of color feminists' term *intersectionality*, which refers to the complexities of race,

gender, and sexuality as they are utilized in the persistence of hierarchies of power within racist, antiracist, and decolonizing movements (28).

Judy Tzu-Chun Wu continues this analysis in her essay "Asian American Feminisms and Women of Color Feminisms: Radicalism, Liberalism, and Invisibility." Wu maintains that Asian and American women theorists of gender oppression and activists for social justice have been understudied in many academic fields (44). Asian American feminisms, such as radical Asian/American feminism, recognize Asian women globally as agents of change rather than as victims to rescue. Asian American women in liberal feminisms challenge the simplistic binary of *radical* versus *liberal*, having been largely overlooked and rendered invisible in the account of US feminisms. Wu reveals how Asian American women have co-created third-world feminism, formed alliances with other women of color in the US, and discovered political inspirations and solidarity. Wu's rich scholarly, textual, and historical elucidation compels us to think more deeply about the impact of Asian American feminisms and to uphold an accurate account of feminist history in the US and beyond.

Part 2: "Erotic (Dis)Connections: Epistemologies of Asian American Sexual Politics," contains two essays. In "Without Enhancements: Sexual Violence in the Everyday Lives of Asian American Women," Erin Khue Ninh engages readers with a few heartrending, personal stories that address sexual violence at different stages of an Asian woman's life. Going beyond stereotypes of Asian American women as sex toys, cute, subservient, man-serving or cast as "lotus blossoms" or "dragon ladies," Ninh indicates that Asian American women's experiences of sexual coercion are misrepresented by the model-minority paradigm as a subject-formation. The model minority infiltrates cultural imperatives to produce Asian American women wired to always be pleasing to others. Such a gendered grammar of violence, adhering to a script of the subject, needs to be deconstructed by grappling with the model-minority racial project as it shapes possibilities integral to politically redefining Asian American feminisms. Readers are invited to reflect on the politics of accountability in the ways Asian Americans have internalized and reinforced their racial construction as a model minority.

Thomas Xavier Sarmiento undertakes the link between contemporary diasporic Filipinx literature and Filipinx American feminism in his essay, "Peminist and Queer Affiliation in Literature as a Blueprint for Filipinx Decolonization and Liberation." Sarmiento claims that peminist, or Filipinx feminist, queer scholars and activists share the macropolitical project of women of color feminisms while focusing on the micropolitical context of the Philippines' anti-sexism, anti-imperialism, decolonization, and liberation. This plentiful literature, less prescriptive, more inviting, supplies a multidimensional perspective and pedagogical tool for social justice and intersectional decolonial politics, and more important, a critique of the confluence of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, and empire: a space to imagine differently the world in which we live.

In part 3, "Decolonial Investments: Centering Indigeneity and Orienting against Settler Complicities," two native Hawaiian feminist scholars, Stephanie Nohelani Teves and Maile Arvin, argue passionately about their Indigenous Pacific Islander identity in the essay "Decolonizing API: Centering Indigenous Pacific Islander Feminism." They outline a history of erasure and dissimilarity, as well as structural differences in notions of citizenship, migration, sovereignty, and indigeneity. It is captivating to learn about the true meaning of "Oceania" (the

Pacific Islands) and the tension between Pacific Islander feminisms and Asian American feminisms, as well as about the authors' intellectual and political struggle to dislodge their unique feminist perspective from demographic groupings and colonialism. Pacific Islander feminists refuse to be absorbed by Asian Americans into their organizational, intellectual, and political projects. It is time, they argue, to demystify Pacific Islander imagery from being framed through an ever-present eroticization and pervasive idea of a tropical and sexual wonderland. Oceania is a vexed place, and its people are heavily regulated by colonial governments at many levels. The authors call for a full and intricate understanding of Pacific Islanders, not collapsing and reducing them, and more insightfully, caution that Asian Americans are accountable for this kind of oppression, for example, "Hula dancing is a site of knowledge not erotic exercise" (121)--a powerful revelation for readers.

Tamsin Kimoto's elaboration of "restive orientation" in "Becoming Restive: Orientations in Asian American Feminist Theory and Praxis" highlights a genuinely significant theoretical construction and contribution to this volume. The term *restive* encompasses two contradictory meanings: "a willful desire to move where one is" as well as "a stubborn insistence on remaining where one is" (139). This positioning of Asian American feminist theory and praxis opens a new way to challenge the coloniality framing the "civilized West" against the "backward East," particularly through women of color coalitional politics against the dismissal of non-Western ways of knowing. The restiveness is a refusal to move by thinking through the dynamics of silence and solidarity. This philosophical meaning of restiveness is well applied in enhancing feminist efforts.

In "Navigating Colonial Pitfalls: Race, Citizenship and the Politics of 'South Asian Canadian' Feminism," Sunera Thobani presents a South Asian Canadian/American experience to complicate the struggle within a multicultural setting and colonial/racial practices. She appeals to a shifting paradigm and rethinks the structural location toward a historicized and contextualized anticolonial understanding.

In part 4, "Beyond 'Culture Clash' Reductions: Organizing against State and Interpersonal Violence," three essays challenge Asian-backward/US-progressive binaries and go beyond those "cultural clash" reductions in the life of a non-English-speaking Hmong refugee, a Filipina migrant worker, and a pregnant, unmarried Indian American woman.

A Hmong shaman spiritual healer and refugee-community advocate for health, race, and gender, Ma Vang, in her essay "The Language of Care: Hmong Refugee Activism and a Feminist Refugee Epistemology," delivers powerful evidence for the role of knowledge and how it can produce and inform a politics of social justice and advocate for an epistemology of care, such as "help people not to die" (190).

Gina Velasco's analysis of the exploitations of a Filipina "trafficked woman" in "Negotiating Legacies: The 'Traffic in Women' and the Politics of Filipina/o American Feminist Solidarity" weaves theoretical frameworks of transitional feminists, women of color feminists, and Filipina/o American diasporic feminists into a coherent coalitional politics based on shared political goals and solidarity.

The legal and cultural struggle of Purvi Patel, a thirty-three-year-old Indian American woman, in Priya Kandaswamy's essay "Race, Reproductive Justice, and the Criminalization of Purvi Patel" expounds many hidden questions on how pregnant Asian women are specifically targeted, and what role racialized and gendered constructions of Asian women's criminality play in light of political epistemologies and mass media. Kandaswamy lucidly evinces these issues in the context of transformation of state structures, internal community dynamics, and individual subjectivities.

With part 5, "Incommensurability and (In)Visibility: Theorizing an Asian American Feminist Praxis," the volume ends with two significant theoretical questions as part of Asian American feminist praxis: incommensurability and invisibility. In "Multiplicity, Women of Color Politics, and an Asian American Feminist Praxis," Lynn Fujiwara shows through her personal journey that multiplicity is a tool, language, and conceptual framework for illuminating the factors that inform the struggles and tensions among Asian American feminisms and beyond. Intersectionality has an epistemological primacy that demands methodological and political actions in shaping feminist solidarity. A strong political consciousness is foundational in the interdependence of all oppressions and possibilities for liberation.

Shireen Roshanravan starts her essay, "Weaponizing Our (In)Visibility: Asian American Feminist Ruptures of the Model-Minority Optic," with a story about Peter Liang, a Chinese American police officer, to analyze the dynamic interplay of Asian Americans' silent, obedient, racially ethnic invisibility and public visibility. She insists that Asian American racialization is "neither black nor white" but engenders a *third racial space* (268) that deconstructs the model-minority myth. Asian American visibility bears a coalitional imperative to invest in horizontal coalitional communication of cross-racial solidarity. Debunking the model-minority project embodies critical evidence that Asian Americans are also oppressed racial minorities, albeit in different ways.

This volume makes a valuable and unique contribution to the articulation of an Asian American feminist framework and crafts teachable materials focusing on the dynamics, tensions, and parallels between Asian American feminisms and women of color feminisms. It draws attention to the historically and culturally specific theoretical frameworks that are constitutive of resistant possibilities, violent realities, and political solidarities.

This inspiring volume sheds light on a complex question: *What are Asian American and Pacific Islander feminisms?* It offers analysis and language that enable readers to think about how race, gender, sexuality, class, and citizenship have shaped Asian American communities and politics. It also provides readers with a gendered lens through which to make sense of the role and presence of Asian American women. Furthermore, it examines the racialized gender dynamics of Asian Americans as they disclose oppressive structures on several fronts.

Women of color as a political identification exemplifies the necessity of constructive politics that can identify, address, and change the cultural and political landscape. Thus, this collection of voices "intentionally emphasizes conceptual, methodological, epistemic, and historical analyses as an urgent political project to offer ways of identifying injustice and strategies that can better inform an Asian American feminist praxis" (7). This effort has successfully invoked cross-racial

feminist coalitions and generated a deeper knowledge of women of color. This work can easily stand with Chicanx and Latinx, Indigenous, and Black feminisms to open coalitional possibilities in ongoing struggles for social justice.

This volume notably argues that "difference" is a site of knowledge that can amplify and sharpen our own understanding and sociopolitical location. It is intriguing to read the essays from Indigenous Islanders, South Asian Americans, and Arab Americans, particularly in their critiques of Asian American studies. This is an informed and responsible way to open honest discussions on difference as they reflect our own bias and complicity in dealing with "otherness." This volume exemplifies how to avoid "epistemicide" that derails, silences, and destroys knowledge, memories, and practices related to other cultures.

Readers will be educated and enlightened about the problems of difference and accountability and given an intellectual lens to amplify the complexities of Asian American feminisms. Readers are given an opportunity to explore the various conceptual constellations and different routes for critical appropriation and appreciation.

One of the many striking features of this book is that all contributors write in and through their own specific geography and body politics that bring to light the unique struggles and tensions with all kinds of challenges and disciplinary mandates. They have engaged in a wide range of activities to dare, rework, and reshape knowledge-production in the academic field, as well as to bring meaningful social change and transformation to local Asian communities. Some of the contributors bring readers' attention to particular "on-the-ground" Asian American feminist political mobilizations, such as *Partners in Healing*, *Af3irm*, *The Asian4Black Lives Network*. These groups offer a broader conceptualization of solidarity, coalitional possibilities, settler colonialism, and heterogeneity. It is worth mentioning that this book demonstrates a close link between "academic feminism" and "on-the-ground" feminism to foster violence-free ways of living, thinking, and loving.

Lastly, the volume's introduction is concise and helpful in tying all the chapters together with an internal coherence. It not only perceptively steers readers but also conceptualizes and integrates the issues at hand on a solid intellectual and scholarly foundation. This introduction gives the volume an uplifting and substantial boost. Here is a small example from the introduction, which can also serve as the concluding note of this review. The editors signal their intellectual humility by noting the limits of their own volume, particularly "the limits of our own perspective, knowledge, and locations in relation to the heterogeneous communities of struggle to whom we seek accountability in elaborating an Asian American feminist politics." (22) A rewarding read for all!