Introduction

Across Global Souths: Asian Migrations through the U.S. South and the Circum-Caribbean

A Special Issue of the American Studies Journal

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Across Global Souths: Asian Migrations through the U.S. South and the Circum-Caribbean investigates Asian/American cultures, politics, and relationships across multiple Souths, with an emphasis on the U.S. South and the Caribbean. Edward Said's foundational *Orientalism* (1978) has been expanded and extrapolated to multiple frameworks that situate Asian peoples and populations in terms of the East versus the West; this concept continues to circulate in the United States, where "Asian America" is largely envisioned as only populating the East and West coasts. The *Across Global Souths* project reframes the conversation with an emphasis on journeys to and from multiple Souths. The guest editors consider the broader geopolitical designation of "South" in the United States, including Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas, and the U.S. Gulf Coast as a region in and of itself. *Asian Americans in Dixie* provides a critical reference point, defining the South as "a region of the United States and a space connected to and part of other transnational spaces" (Joshi and Desai, 2013, 4). Grounded within recent scholarly developments in the field of American Studies, we have invited further reflections on the diasporic condition of the category "Asian," as well as the diasporic condition of the category "Southerner," simultaneously challenging notions of an exclusively white, Euro-American U.S.

0026-3079/2020/5904-023$2.50/0 American Studies, 61.3 (2022)

citizenry. A more inclusive, diverse conceptualization of what it means to be "American" subverts common racial identifications, which frequently fail to address the critical role that adopted cultural and ethnic traditions have played in the development of the U.S. national landscape; it also undermines notions of an unchanging, fixed identity. Furthermore, "American" is used expansively to consider migrations to and from different locations across the Americas. Framed this way, Brazil—the home to the largest population of Japanese people outside of Japan—and Cuba's Havana Chinatown emerge as rich sites for exploration.

What distinguishes this special issue, firmly ensconced within both American Studies and current Global South frameworks, is the comparative focus on Asians in the U.S. South and the Caribbean and Caribbean diasporas. Although Global South Studies has raised important questions on "south/south" and hemispheric discourses, and Caribbean Studies has long foregrounded archipelagic and transnational critiques of colonialism, an interdisciplinary examination of Asian migrations within two locations that share centuries of overlapping histories has been understudied. For instance, the troubling "John Chinaman" stereotype of the nineteenth century, which depicted Chinese immigrants to the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, and Australia as "sinister, crafty, dirty, diseased, inscrutable, economically threatening, and, of course, strangely inassimilable," is commonly framed as "widespread *in the West*" (Lee Loy 1, 2010, emphasis added), resulting from migratory routes that traversed longitudinal, rather than latitudinal, lines. But even as we, the editors and contributors to *Across Global Souths,* foreground the geographical spaces of the U.S. South and the Caribbean in this special issue, we are inspired by broader theorizations of "south" that assemble other underexamined geographies and a range of methodologies, such as ethnographies that allow inquiry within unexpected sites of cultural formations, like restaurants, motels, and fishing-folk circles. This project thus convenes scholars working "across" different fields, disciplinary approaches, and research methods to foster greater understanding of the U.S. South–circum-Caribbean network. We feel compelled by stories like that of writer Cristina García, whose novel *Monkey Hunting* (2003) was partially inspired by a visit to a Chinese Cuban restaurant on the Upper West Side of Manhattan and a plate of black beans and pork fried rice. The novel's publication and circulation animate histories of Asian migration to the Americas, and it implicitly critiques the loss of these histories; it also illuminates the scores of lost narratives about North–South crossings, including recipes, and patterns of movement engendered by the Vietnam War. In other words, even as it activates chronicles of the "coolie" trade, García's narrative engages texts that conventionally have been elided from constructions of historical archives (e.g., family recipes) and memories of a war that has been made illegible and obscure in current

knowledge regimes. The novel induces temporal and spatial tensions, connecting the journeys of indentured servants to the Caribbean with a multitude of recollections ignored by national histories and twining together Western European and U.S. colonial oppressions and capitalist aggressions. The compounded histories evident in the encounters depicted in *Monkey Hunting* serve as emblems of the colonial intersections of China, the Caribbean, and the United States, spanning four generations and "ultimately a 120-year dialogue between Cuba and Asia" (García, 2003, 259), allowing the author to craft Asian experiences as fundamental to Cuban history, despite largely being considered unevenly constitutive when viewed alongside the dynamics between European, African, and Indigenous subjects in the region.

Existing scholarship on Asian diasporas makes great strides as single nation and regional studies. Notable recent works include Manu Goswami's *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (2004), which investigates the relationship between nation–state and economy, infrastructure, and global empire building; Eric Tang's *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto* (2015), which frames the legacies of African American slavery and life in urban space to the workings of U.S. empire and the refugee experiences of Cambodians; *Global Intimacies: China and/in the Global South* (Rofel and Sweeney, 2021), a special issue of the *Feminist Studies* journal inspired by the rising cultural influence of China in recent years and the nation's central position in global markets; and *Redefining Multicultural Families in South Korea: Reflections and Future Directions,* a rich collection of essays edited by Minjeong Kim and Hyeyoung Woo (2022).

Other studies focus on the Asian diaspora in terms of global culture. *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World: Diaspora, Empire, and Race* (Choy and Wu, 2017), for example, brings together social scientists and historians, literary scholars and poets, and several interdisciplinary scholars for investigations of worldwide infrastructures that perpetuate gender oppression and the disparities of empire. In their 2022 call for papers for a special issue of *Verge: Studies in Global Asias,* editors Nicolai Volland and Leo Ching focus on "Archipelagic Asias," noting that the study of "Asia" is typically "fragmented along the lines of nations, histories, ethnicities, languages, and disciplines—all concepts that are rooted, epistemologically and pragmatically, on terra firma, on the supposedly sound conceptual ground of a continental Enlightenment tradition." They ask, in turn: "What happens, however, when we shift our point of view, and instead adopt an oceanic perspective? How do our understandings of Asia(s) change when viewed from ashore?" Their proposed reconsideration acknowledges Édouard Glissant's formulations of the archipelagic, as well as Hamashita Takeshi, Rob Wilson, and Kären Wigen's development of "rim" studies to critique maritime traffic, "American militarization

across the Pacific, and oceanic modes of spatial knowledge production." The reference to Glissant also provides an ideological connection to Caribbean spaces—one that we seek to tease out more cogently in our collection. Furthermore, rather than again pursuing the east–west orientation inherent in terms such as transpacific and transatlantic, we aim to be more intentional about north–south journeys and orientation when it comes to Asian American and diasporic identities.

Outside the scope of our project, but useful for our contemplations, Nafisa Essop Sheik's "Words on Black Water: Setting South African 'Plantation Literature' Afloat on the *Kala Pani*" (2021) contests the land-focused historiography of Indian indentureship in South Africa, which she claims insufficiently attends to "the opacity and fluidity that crossing the *Kala Pani*" (literally, the "Black Water"). Sheik spotlights the ways that crossing of the "opaque" Indian Ocean allowed lower- and middle-class/caste subjects to transform themselves, engaging in radical social mobility during the literal mobility of the voyage. Important for our considerations here is the geographical north–south journey that parallels the migrations of Indian laborers to the Caribbean.

In Caribbean Studies, several scholars have taken up the transatlantic *Kala Pani* crossing in their work (see, for example, selections from Marina Carter and Khal Torabully's anthology *Coolitude* [2002]; Brinda Mehta's *Diasporic (Dis)Locations* [2004]; the 2010 special issue of the journal *Anthurium,* "The Asian Experience in the Caribbean"; Alison Klein's "Tangled Up: Gendered Nationhood in Indo-Caribbean Indenture Narratives" [2015]; and Lisa Outar's "Touching the Shores of Home: Guyana, Indo-Caribbeanness, Feminism and Return" [2018] and editorial collaboration with Gabrielle Hosein, *Indo-Caribbean Feminist Thought: Genealogies, Theories, Enactments* [2016], which brings together three generations of scholars, artists, and activists). Contributors to the field have investigated themes such as globalization and migration, gender and sexuality, identity and belonging, and performance culture in materials from anglophone, francophone, and hispanophone spaces, tending to concentrate their interrogations on the east–west voyages from China and India, as well as cultural syncretism involving peoples from Asia (typically framed as East), Africa (typically framed as West Africa, although enslaved Africans were forcibly taken from myriad sites on the continent), and Europe (also framed as West).

In that trajectory, in the United States, numerous studies interrogate the injustices of Japanese relocation in and from Hawaii, California, Oregon, and Washington State—locations associated with the "West" and "coastal" communities—but many fewer historians have tackled Asian migrations to the "South," such as those described by Japanese American writer Cynthia Kadohata, who moved from Chicago to Georgia and then Arkansas as a child in the 1950s and 1960s. She pulls from these

experiences in crafting the fictional Takeshimas, who move from Iowa to rural Georgia post–World War II (WWII) to participate in the chick-sexing industry (see Anatol, "Ghosts of Japanese/American History in *Kira-Kira,*" 2021). The Asian American presence in the South dates back to the late eighteenth century, with the Filipino Saint Malo settlement in Louisiana; Chinese workers from both California and Cuba arrived to the Mississippi Delta in the nineteenth century. In 1905, just months before Korea was formalized as a protectorate of imperial Japan, more than 1,000 Koreans boarded a cargo ship headed for Mexico, eager to believe labor brokers' stories promising milk and honey and four years of labor that would ensure enough money to return home to Korea and live prosperously. In striking contrast, Yuri Doolan's "Transpacific Camptowns: Korean Women, U.S. Army Bases, and Military Prostitution in America" (2019) details how the reduction of U.S. military personnel in South Korea in the 1970s resulted in large numbers of sex workers arriving in the U.S. South, given the preponderance of troops residing in places like Fort Bragg (Fayetteville, North Carolina), Fort Campbell (Clarksville, Tennessee), and Fort Hood (Killeen, Texas). His exploration of transpacific circuits across these two Souths represents much of the work we hope to continue in *Across Global Souths,* as we seek to expand critical discussions about the Global South in a transnational framework that foregrounds new relationships among American Studies, Asian American Studies, U.S. Southern Studies, and Caribbean Studies.

Across Global Souths: Asian Migrations through the U.S. South and the Circum-Caribbean is further inspired by the growing body of scholarship on Latinx relationships emerging from the as-yet-unended Korean War. Alongside scholars such as A.J. Yumi Lee and Daniel Kim, Joo Ok Kim's emphasis on Chicano narratives of the war in her book *Warring Genealogies* (2022) and her work on this special issue offer ways to engage the problematics of thinking about the temporalities and to probe how culture and geopolitics overlap and converge in multiple Souths—South Korea, the U.S.–Mexico border, the larger U.S. Southwest, and various cultural contact zones. **Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi**'s article for this special issue, **"Afro-Asian Intimacies across Southern Cartographies: Race, Sex, and Gender in Toni Morrison's *Home* and Yusef Komunyakaa's *Dien Cai Dao*,"** queries other racialized affinities emerging from the Korean War and Vietnam War, alongside scholars like Lee and Sunny Yang in their existing work centering Black and Asian relationalities. These ideas find purchase in the unending war of colonialism, deeply embedded into the socioeconomic and political designs of many post-independence spaces in the South of the Caribbean. We join scholars Junyoung Verónica Kim and Andrea Mendoza, who organized a session for the 2022 Latin American Studies Association Conference titled "Race, Capital and the Afterlives of Area Studies: A Transpacific Perspective,"

wrestling with these concepts to facilitate better comprehension of the complex systems of racialization operating across geographically, historically, and linguistically distinct Asian/American diasporas.

Several years ago, discovering that we (the guest editors) had both worked with Patricia Powell's 1998 novel *The Pagoda* in our teaching, we decided to co-write a scholarly piece, which became the foundation for our larger project. Since that time, a growing number of novels, short fiction, memoirs, and films have received increased critical and popular attention for their attempts to capture the experiences of Asians in southern spaces: although contemporary mainstream audiences may not yet have found their way to cultural productions such as Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010), there has been significant buzz around the Oscar award–winning *Minari* (2020), the documentary *Jeronimo: The Untold Tale of Koreans in Cuba* (2019), and Steven Yeun's role as Ricky "Jupe" Park in Jordan Peele's 2022 horror film *Nope. Mississippi Masala* (1991), one of the earliest feature films to take up the transnational complexities of gender, sexuality, and racialization across the U.S. South, Uganda, and India, was rereleased in 2022. The lived experiences of scholars across global Souths has also surfaced in the June 2022 issue of *American Quarterly,* which features both Dylan Rodríguez's (American Studies Association [ASA] president, 2020–2021) and Cathy Schlund-Vials's (ASA president, 2021–2022) presidential addresses. Rodríguez's address on reformist counterinsurgency closes in on "two geographically disparate sites": Manila, Philippines, and Alexandria, Virginia. Schlund-Vials's address narrates her family's military relocation to Valdosta, Georgia, at age eight, "thoroughly unaware that there was such a thing as 'the American South'" where she and her brother, "two mixed-race Cambodian American adoptees… learned what it meant to be different, unwanted, and othered." Taken together, these creative and academic engagements theorize the tensions, legacies, and possibilities of Asian racialization across global Souths.

In 2021, we participated in the Association for Asian American Studies Conference, *Unsettling Transpacific Ecologies,* and were excited to find that the innovative research of our fellow panelists on "Transpacific Engagements with the 'Southern Question'" fit squarely into our conceptualizations of this special issue. Anatol's paper, "Haunting Histories: Japanese American Ecologies in Cynthia Kadohata's *Kira-Kira,*" and Joo Ok Kim's "Gendered Southern Imaginaries in Toni Morrison's *Home* and Susan Choi's *The Foreign Student*" came into conversation with Gandhi's "Transpacific Southern Translations: Representing South Vietnam through the American South," Marguerite Nguyen's "Refugee Ecologies in Louisiana: The South as America's Future," and commentary from Christine Mok and members of the virtual audience. Not all were able to contribute in the end, but we thank them for the robust dialogue. It was

intellectually stimulating and generative for our future work.

We sought more essays that articulate the transregional, comparative U.S. South/Caribbean emphasis and interdisciplinary approaches, reflected in the articles of this special issue.

The first piece in the volume considers translations of people, concepts, and practices from South Asia to the rest of the world, but southern California in particular. **Hareem Khan's "Producing Ayurveda: Authenticity and Race in the Beauty and Wellness Industries"** concentrates attention on one of the oldest Indigenous medical systems of India, dating back thousands of years, as it has become increasingly visible across global beauty and wellness industries. Focusing on communities in Los Angeles, Khan ruminates on the processes of racialization that underscore the popularity of Ayurveda in recent years: unlike other forms of alternative medicine—particularly in the United States—Ayurveda features strong associations with India, Indians, and Hinduism. Khan argues that these connections warrant a critical analysis of race-making and constructions of "authenticity" in regions outside Ayurveda's South Asian origins.

The workings of identity construction are also key to **Simi Kang's "What is Refugee Resilience?: Reframing Survival under Environmental Sacrifice,"** here in conjunction with socio-economic class and environmental politics. Kang elaborates upon how the experiences of southeast Asian American "fisherfolk" along the Gulf Coast of Louisiana reflect a number of inequitable power dynamics. With personal interviews placed alongside the historical record, the piece lays forth the ways that Asian American fishing communities in the New Orleans area are forced to endure as "resilient refugees" rather than allowed to flourish—primarily because they have been marginalized from decision-making spaces and disregarded as possessing any expertise about the ecosystems they live in. Kang's careful ethnographic research provides a robust analysis of short-term and long-lasting familial, social, and ecological impacts of governmental neglect. The piece is a significant contribution in the present moment, when Southeast Asian refugee, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx communities in Louisiana and around the nation are repeatedly imperiled by forced displacement and constructions of them as disposable. In addition, Kang's discussion indicates the racialized foundations of state—and by extension, federal—projects that seem to alleviate environmental damage but perpetuate environmental racism and myriad social injustices.

Davorn Sisavath also engages with Asian communities of Louisiana's Gulf Coast as she charts the placemaking moves of refugees in **"Lane Xang Village: Place-making in Louisiana's Iberia Parish."** Approaching the concept of place as a fluid category that is imbued with purpose, the continual activity required of constructing identity and ne-

gotiating various contestations, Sisavath contemplates how residents of Lane Xang Village navigate histories of forced displacement—including the temporal dimension of environmental displacement—to create a grounded sense of place. She employs census data, newspaper articles, and YouTube videos alongside Mike Tidwell's book *Bayou Farewell* to ground her analyses. Sisavath articulates how everyday practices are crucial to elaborating upon the ways "Laotians negotiate their spatial practices and experiences in a region entrenched in racial segregation and economic hierarchies." The significance of theorizing "Across Global Souths" in Sisavath's essay is evident in the limited scholarship centering Lao immigrants in the region, and in the ways that Southeast Asian populations and their experiences have historically been subsumed into studies focusing on Vietnamese subjects. Furthermore, "Lane Xang Village" prioritizes a critical humanist approach that moves beyond the social science quantitative data about its subjects.

Gandhi brings Vietnam and also South Korea into conversation with African American Studies in her investigation of **"Afro-Asian Intimacies Across Southern Cartographies"** in the works of two prolific U.S. writers: the novel *Home,* by Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, is read alongside Yusef Komunyakaa's poetry collection *Dien Cai Dao* for examples of interracial relationships resulting from the Korean and the Vietnam Wars. Gandhi employs the literary texts to illustrate examples of antiblackness, the policing of gender and sexuality during wartime conflicts, and the militarism and surveillance of U.S. imperial movements across three distinct geopolitical spaces: the U.S. South, South Korea, and South Vietnam. In doing so, the article effectively expands upon existing scholarship to complicate what "the South" means, pushing beyond a U.S. framework to urge for a more expansive "global southscape" without homogenizing or oversimplifying the subjects, cultures, or politics of each location.

The co-editors' essay, **"Queering/Querying the Text in Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* and Sui Sin Far's Jamaica Works,"** also employs literary analysis and assessments of imperial power dynamics as it takes up writing by African Jamaican author Patricia Powell and Chinese Canadian writer Sui Sin Far, born a century apart but both bringing forceful critiques of the British Empire and colonial knowledge production to their texts. Concentrating on representations of reading, writing, documentation, accounting, and literacy in Powell's novel of a Chinese/Jamaican community and in Far's Jamaica stories—particularly "Leaves from the Mental Portfolio of a Eurasian" and "The Sugar-Cane Baby"—enables Anatol and Kim to narrate the complex ways that composing and deciphering all kinds of texts can contribute to and subvert empire building. That both Far and Powell contest the imperial project by imposing their own forms of (il)legibility on their bodies also functions as a "queer" form of textuality addressed in the article.

Rosanne Sia further theorizes sexuality and gender in **"Transpacific Exoticisms: Performing Asia across the U.S. Southern Border,"** which traces the careers of several traveling nightclub entertainers, both Asian and multiracial, as she explicates the transpacific linkages that connected the U.S. South with the circum-Caribbean and the U.S.–Mexico borderlands in the mid-twentieth century. Focusing on the experiences of Florence Ahn, Estela, Jadin Wong, and Su Muy Key, who performed in Havana, New York, Miami, Monterey, and the Rio Grande Valley, as well as in Hollywood films from the early 1940s into the Cold War era, Sia traces an Asian presence that transformed as it journeyed through the U.S. South, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Featuring biographical, historical, and ethnographic details, "Transpacific Exoticisms" interrogates how perceptions of Asian identity, and particularly the trope of the exotic Asian woman, were accommodated, vexed, and constantly shifting in an array of Southern spaces. Sia's exploration of these transnational post-WWII figures, now largely forgotten, combats the erasure of the Asian presence in certain U.S. geographical landscapes, in the music and dance that came to be called "Latin," and in the shaping of a mestizo citizenry in the national projects in Cuba and Mexico. This critical attention to the construction of complicated racial, cultural, geographical, and gender imaginaries shows how the entertainers "disturbed the Black and White binary in the U.S. South" and illuminates readers' understanding of the cultural and demographic flows of multiple American Souths.

Future volumes might include comparative research into the politics and politicians of Asian heritage across the U.S. South and Caribbean, such as Bobby Jindal, Cheddi Jagan, Nikki Haley, and Kamala Persad-Bissessar; Asian American grassroots politics, such as the work of the Asian American Advocacy Fund; radical political cultures, such as blackdesisecrethistory.org; the experiences and contributions of Asians in the nineteenth-century history of the Americas, such as Chinese workers relocating from Cuba and California to the Mississippi Delta and Asians involved in the building of the Panama Canal; overlapping legacies of food and colonialism across the U.S. South and Caribbean; the literary production of more recent writers, like Stacey-Ann Chin, put into conversations with authors of older generations, like V.S. Naipaul; television sitcoms and series such as *Fresh Off the Boat* and *Lovecraft Country*; and alternate kinships and genealogies, especially in the context of Asian adoptees in the U.S. South and the implications of DNA ancestry testing on Asian/American populations.

As we compose this introduction in the summer of 2022, we see how history has cycled back on itself to engender distressing repetitions. In 1870s California, as Chinese/American cigar manufacturers revealed themselves to be a competitive market force, Euro-American business-

es began to claim that Chinese cigars had been crafted by "Mongolian leprous hands" and then "sealed with black spit" (Brown and Philips, 1996, 71). The Page Act of 1875 framed Chinese women in particular as synonymous with diseased morals, corrupting the (white) American males with whom they came into contact. The strict immigration quotas of the 1924 National Origins Act in the United States did nothing to ease the identification of Asian immigrants with illness and contamination, nor did the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (the McCarran-Walter Act). Family reunification policies put into place starting in 1965 encouraged greater Asian migration to the United States, but Donald Trump's insistence on calling COVID-19 the "Kung Flu" and "China Virus" during his presidency and run for reelection contributed to increased physical violence against people of Asian heritage. The October 2020 *Journal of Asian American Studies* special issue highlighted anti-Asian violence and xenophobia as a pandemic alongside the coronavirus pandemic; the March 2021 Atlanta shooting, targeting working-class Asian women, brought into stark relief how far we have not come.

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