
Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics. Josephine Nock-Hee Park. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008. viii + 193 pages. \$55.00 cloth.

Josephine Nock-Hee Park's *Apparitions of Asia* is among the first book-length studies of Asian American poetry. It offers fresh and persuasive readings of major writers such as Lawson Fusao Inada, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Myung Mi Kim. Defining this emerging field, Park identifies the peculiar bind faced by Asian American poets: they sought to create a revolutionary literature that resisted racism and stereotype, yet they were also "heirs to an avant-garde shot through with Orientalism" (95), evidenced in works by poets from Ezra Pound to Gary Snyder. It is often assumed that Asian American literature distinguishes itself through its wholesale rejection of Orientalism. Yet Park claims that the crucial gesture of Asian American poetry was not a denial of Orientalism but an embrace of its paradoxes. For poets such as Pound and Snyder, Asia was not a symbol of irreducible foreignness, but rather a means of defining America and their own place in it—unwittingly opening a space for Asian American writers to stake their own claims to America. "Minority poets," Park asserts, "found a way into the American terrain through counterculture poetics" (106).

The tradition of American poetic Orientalism Park outlines has its origins in the work of Pound, whose translations in *Cathay* established a modern idiom for Chinese poetry in English, and who drew on Chinese history and philosophy to animate his epic *Cantos*. Pound thus placed China at the center of his modernist revolution in poetry. Doing so, he also placed Asia at the heart of the American literary tradition, using China as a conduit to American identity during his long sojourn in Europe. Park asserts that Pound's textual negotiations with China take their place in a material history of transpacific commerce that defined twentieth-century America.

Park finds a pivot between modernist poetics and Asian American writing in the work of the Beat poet Gary Snyder, who continues Pound's poetics and his "belief in Oriental discipline for a wayward America" (58). Like Pound, Snyder used Asia as a route to the heart of America, traveling to Japan and embracing Zen Buddhism in order to connect himself more closely to native American cultures. However, Snyder's cultural appropriations took place in a context where they were far more likely to be challenged, as the ethnic nationalist movements of the 1960s raised American awareness of race and made it increasingly difficult for Snyder to lay claim to ostensibly universal Zen truths. The strains Park detects

in Snyder's poetry—its skepticism about language and its insistence that the “real work” lies outside the boundaries of the poem—are signs of the waning authority of modernist Orientalism and of an impending return to racial particularity in the work of Asian American writers.

The boldest move in Park's book is its direct link between Pound's and Snyder's Orientalism and the work of Asian American poets from the 1970s onward. Many Asian American writers and critics would deny such a connection, seeing the strength of Asian American writing in its refusal of Orientalist stereotypes. Yet Park makes a powerful and persuasive case for an organic link between modernist Orientalism and the most important innovations in Asian American poetry. In her reading of *The Buddha Bandits Down Highway 99*, a work of the late 1970s by Inada, Garrett Kaoru Hongo, and Alan Chong Lau, Park identifies the poem's Beat lineage: its title echoes Jack Kerouac's *Dharma Bums*, and its setting alludes to a section of Snyder's epic *Mountains and Rivers without End*. These Asian American poets' engagement with Beat Orientalism is critical. Highlighting the local California histories Snyder overlooks—from San Francisco's Chinatown to the internment camp at Tule Lake—the poem responds to Snyder's location of Asia in the American landscape by establishing a distinctively Asian American presence that is based on a politicized awareness of racial identification.

Park makes a compelling case that such critical uses of the modernist tradition underpin the most accomplished Asian American poetry—an insight she puts to excellent use in her readings of Cha and Kim, two of the most challenging writers in the Asian American canon. Critics have long struggled with Cha's *Dictee*, often seeing in its refusal of narrative and its mixing of genres a sharp divergence from convention. Park argues that *Dictee*, with its intertextuality and use of myth, displays a deeper allegiance to the modernist tradition, giving Cha the formal tools to describe the transpacific legacy of colonialism in Korea. In the minimalist precision of Kim's poetry, Park sees the legacy of another modernist movement—that of imagism, developed by Pound and inspired by Japanese haiku. In a remarkable reversal, Kim takes the imagist mode grounded in the East and turns it back upon itself, “retrain[ing] it on the Eastern stage of war” in her poems of colonialism and migration (150). In Park's analysis, there is no opposition between modernist form and Asian American politics; instead, the former is precisely what enables the latter as Asian American poets appropriate the tools of modernist Orientalism for their own purposes.

Apparitions of Asia authoritatively demonstrates that tying Asian American poetry firmly to the traditions of American poetry strengthens, rather than weakens, its power as a critical and resistant discourse. The book should be required reading for both Asian Americanists and scholars

of American poetry, who will discover unexpected and productive points of connection between their fields. If this book offers a powerful argument for the place of poetry in Asian American studies, it also stakes a strong claim for the centrality of Asian American writers in the wider field of American poetry. Asian American poetry, in Park's reading, becomes American poetry's site of self-critique, in which the Orientalism that grounds twentieth-century American poetry is exposed, historicized, and turned to new critical ends.

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