

Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War. Jodi Kim. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. ISBN: 9780816655922

American interventions in East Asia, Cold War epistemology, and Asian American cultural productions all receive due reconsideration of their interrelationships in Jodi Kim's 2010 monograph, *Ends of Empire*. In this fascinating work, Kim argues that Asian American cultural critiques of the Cold War both protested against and internalized the hegemonic narrative of the bipolar struggle present in American governmental and societal renderings of it. Although Kim mainly focuses on their critiques, she avoids reducing Asian American cultural products to either reinforcing or resisting dominant narrative tropes; instead, she uncovers the complicated coexistence of the two. Through these cultural productions, Asian American cultural producers clarified what they perceived as the "ends" of American imperial projects in East Asia (in temporal, geographic, functional, and consequential terms). And yet, despite all of the ends imagined through these cultural productions, American empire never actually ended. This lack of closure pervades these cultural products as well as geopolitical reality.

By examining the interconnections of American overseas ventures during the Cold War and Asian American cultural productions, Kim mostly contributes to understanding the latter. Although such cultural productions are often regarded as "ethnic minority literature," Kim argues that this label was imposed retroactively. Instead, the Cold War and its "Imperial Gendered Racial Political Unconscious" played an integral role in forming and shaping these products. As American interventions disrupted the lives of countless overseas communities, East Asians immigrated to the United States. To them (as future cultural producers), American policy signaled not *inclusion* in a multicultural society, but *expulsion* from their homes overseas. Furthermore, Kim, in line with other scholars, acknowledges the malleability of American

imperial discourse vis-à-vis Cold War East Asia, while also recognizing historical circumstances specific to particular countries. Sensitive to this, Kim ably moves from China to Japan to Korea, and finally to Vietnam; although these interventions took place over a thirty-year period, the American rhetoric employed to justify actions and the “ends” of these actions remained by-and-large the same. As a result of this rigid discourse, Asian Americans revealed similar themes of displacement in their works.

In chapters two through five, Kim explores a series of Asian American cultural productions and the themes within them, both specific to each group’s Cold War experiences and shared across the major countries in which the United States intervened. For China, this involved confronting the longstanding tradition of American discourse presenting that country as a metaphor: a sleeping giant, a fabled market, a red menace. With Japan and Japanese Americans, American policies during and after the Second World War centered on the racial and gendered logics of rehabilitation through feminization, demilitarization, and domestication. The “hot wars” in Korea and Vietnam, though, work best in this analysis, as Kim provides a strong juxtaposition of public imaginings of the two conflicts while highlighting critical continuities through cultural productions. Instead of being the “Forgotten War” of the United States, the Korean War was seared into the minds and memories of generations of Korean Americans. And while the Vietnam War remains a “hypervisible” conflict in American national memory, most Americans still consider it a conflict “over there.” Yet Kim shows how the American presence in Vietnam produced a Vietnamese American presence largely ignored by the dominant narrative. Like many Korean Americans, Vietnamese Americans arrived in the US as war orphans: the products of American imperial projects overseas in every sense. The testimonials of Asian American war orphans, who were often removed from their home countries under false pretenses (such as

Deann Borshay Liem's *First Person Plural* and the stories in Aimee Phan's documentary *We Shall Never Meet*), attest a double social death: once in their home countries, and again in their country of adoption. Such accounts, and others, play into the larger themes of expulsion in Asian American Cold War cultural productions.

While all of the chapters flow together nicely, each can be read as a stand-alone piece. Every chapter provides a clear explanation of its intended argument and gives a fairly succinct overview of American foreign policy toward the specific country being examined. With the context in place, Kim then delves into a variety of Asian Americans cultural products and their broader significance as part of these relations and the discourse governing them. In the chapter on Japan, for example, Kim deftly moves from Steven Okazaki's 1992 documentary *Survivors* to David Mura's 1991 memoir *Turning Japanese* to *My Year of Meats* by Ruth L. Ozeki. Although all of these products were created after the conclusion of the Cold War, that conflict's—and the Second World War's—lingering effects of gendered and racial rehabilitation of Japanese and Japanese Americans (along with broader themes of displacement) ring throughout each of them. But although each chapter and cultural product analysis could be read independently, the greatest benefit of this work comes from reading across the chapters and experiences of individual groups.

The very first chapter, however, is a curious addition. In “Cold War Logics, Cold War Poetics,” Kim examines not Asian American critiques and internalizations of Cold War discourse, but rather Cold War discourse itself. Kim explores the official Cold War discourse through fairly standard government texts: the “Long Telegram,” “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” NSC-68, and NSC 48/1. Aside from the last document, diplomatic historians will find that little new ground is covered here; other scholars, however, may find the information helpful

for setting up the other chapters, although it could easily have been part of the book's introduction instead.

A curious exclusion from the work revolves around the discussion of memory. With the exceptions of *The Manchurian Candidate* and *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (neither of which were produced by Asian Americans), all of the relevant nongovernmental cultural texts examined by Kim come from the 1980s and after (long removed from the actual American interventions). Memory mainly factors in the opening discussion of the genealogy of the term "gook" and the allusions to transgenerational memories of the Korean War. A more thorough investigation of how these memories transform and are themselves contested, as well as a discussion of how these memories linger in diasporic communities, would have greatly enhanced this book.

All said, Jodi Kim's *Ends of Empire* stands out as a powerful reevaluation of Asian American cultural productions and the effects and reception of American Cold War interventions and discourse(s). By not confining her work to one Asian American community, Kim offers a strong example of how to think of these different groups as connected (yet also unique) in their experiences in a way not simply reduced to geographic region of origin. Kim's plentitude of closely-read examples provides a ready-made list for future analyses in American, Asian American, adoption, and postcolonial studies. An ambitious and approachable work, Kim's *Ends of Empire* will easily find a place both in undergraduate surveys and graduate seminars and among specialist and layperson alike.

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