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Asian American writing, in both its earliest manifestations and contemporary expressions, is informed, and to a considerable degree defined, by Asian Americans' racial past and existential experience in America. Of course there is no such thing as one Asian American group, for Asia subsumes hundreds of ethnicities, of the same or different races. King-Kok Cheung writes, "The term 'Asian American literature' generally describes works by writers of diverse national origins—Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, East Indian, Pakistani, Vietnamese, Thai, Cambodian, Laotian, and Pacific Islanders" (xv). However, so far no single study has precisely mapped out the boundaries pertaining to "Asian America," and every author or Asian subgroup has their own understanding and definition of this contested term, which comments on the power differentials and power struggles as well as the complexity of identity politics within the heterogeneous groups. This guide aims to reflect the heterogeneity and diversity within the large rubric of Asian American literature and culture.

The heterogeneity of Asian Americans is embodied in their race, ethnicity, class, politics, religion, culture, and sexual orientation. As Lisa Lowe argues in "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity": "From the perspective of the majority culture, Asian Americans may very well be constructed as different from, and other than, Euro-Americans. But from the perspectives of Asian Americans, we are perhaps even more different, more diverse, among ourselves: being men and women at different distances and generations from our 'original' Asian cultures" (27). Geographically, these peoples emigrated from the same continent, and they have shared the same destination, undergone similar historical and legal experiences, reaped similar rewards, and tasted similar culture- and race-related bitterness. They share similar immigration histories and diasporic movements in the United States and Canada; they pursue both material and political ends in coming to America; and they both face the problems and garner the benefits of assimilation and Americanization, which are sometimes synonymous but not always the same.

The more populous Asian subgroups—Chinese and Japanese—share similar patterns of immigration but have experienced historical and legal events unique to their own home country and ethnicity. The Chinese, for example, along with the Irish and others, provided labor for the construction of America's railroads in the mid-nineteenth century; and yet they suffered a great deal from the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. This legalized discriminatory practice became a major reference point for a considerable amount of Chinese American writing. The building of the transcontinental railroad and the Chinese Exclusion Act expose governmental racism in its most hypocritical and ironical form: the Asian group that contributed significantly to America's material wealth was subjected to the most race-based persecution. Such humiliating experiences, as well as Chinese Americans' remarkable achievements, are thoughtfully represented in works like Kingston's auto/biographical *China Men* and Frank Chin's novel *Donald Duk*, and in occasional poems in Cathy Song's *Picture Bride*. Together,

these works delineate a people who made their mark in American history with sweat and blood and through legal battles.

Japanese Americans, faring only slightly better than their Chinese counterparts during the first four decades of the twentieth century, experienced one of the most humiliating injustices in American history: evacuation and internment by the government after Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The Chinese became the heroes and the Japanese the villains, in public perceptions of the two Asian subgroups. However, the internment of the Japanese in essence differs little from the exclusion of the Chinese six decades earlier: both resulted from legalized racism initiated by the national government and enacted at the local level. This experience had crippling effects on Japanese Americans, as is uncompromisingly depicted in John Okada's *No-No Boy*, Joy Kogawa's *Obasan*, and Hisaye Yamamoto's short fiction, most notably "The Legend of Miss Sasagawara" and "A Fire in Fontana." Thus, internment has been the most traumatic event in the history of the Japanese in North America (similar events happened in Canada) and was seared in its collective memory, which runs deep in the writings of many Japanese American authors.

The Philippines and India, different as they are from China and Japan in racial terms, both were colonized lands and have a colonial past, though they were controlled by different countries. In both cases the colonial experience prompted immigration to North America. In more than one way, the immigration history of Filipinos and Indians is about a quest for freedom and liberty. Carlos Bulosan's autobiographical yet universal *American Is in the Heart*, about the Filipino American immigration and assimilation experience, is a classic that limns such a quest. Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* and *Tiger's Daughter* are likewise bicultural works that depict important facets of the South Asian immigration experience. Vietnamese Americans face yet another set of issues as a result of the U.S. military involvement in Vietnam from 1964 to 1973. The Vietnam War and the armed conflicts inside Cambodia under Pol Pot in the 1970s both caused expatriatism and immigration. Tran Van Dinh's *Blue Dragon, White Tiger*, Wendy Law-Yone's *The Coffin Tree*, and Haing Ngor's *A Cambodian Odyssey* all reflect their respective cultures, domestic upheavals, and diasporic hardships and triumphs, and all helped shape twentieth-century Asian America's literary landscape. This guide reviews such works to provide readers with a sense of their historical, political, literary, and ethnic significances.

The Columbia Guide to Asian American Literature Since 1945 represents North American writers with cultural and ethnic origins in the Asian countries of China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and Vietnam, and in the South and Southeast Asian countries of Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. While the majority of North American writers of Asian descent are American, namely, U.S. citizens and nationals, or simply Asian diasporic writers residing in the country, Canadian writers of Asian ancestry constitute a considerable number as well. The shared language of English helps facilitate such an inclusion; more important, Asians—the Chinese and Japanese in particular—have experienced a similar history of negative sentiment on both sides of the border. Some notorious examples include Canada's 1923 Exclusion Act excluding Chinese from immigration; Canadian citizens of Asian descent being denied the right to vote until 1947; and, even prior to the U.S. government's internment of Japanese Americans, Canada's declaration of the Pacific Coast as a strategic military zone from which residents of Japanese descent were removed. These three examples are evidence of a shared history affected and partly defined by ethnicity and race, complicated by the extreme circumstances of World War II

on both sides of the Pacific. The two English-speaking countries are therefore included in the monolithic expression “America,” which apparently fulfills the reference functions of “North America,” which in turn enables “Asian America” to imply the boundaries of “Asian North America.”

Asia is generally divisible into three geographical areas: East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. East Asia, also known as the Far East, includes China, Japan, and Korea, and as many critics and scholars have argued, “Asian America” has come to mainly refer to people from these three originating countries. Indeed, these peoples seem to have produced the most literary works. Authors of South Asian descent, on the other hand, have generally been treated as one group, perhaps unjustifiably, in Asian American anthologies, collections of critical essays, and other similar publishing endeavors. However, as Ketu H. Katrak points out, “Writers from South Asian nations (themselves often invented as nations by the British) encompass a multiplicity of ethnicities, religions, languages, and cultures. Hence the category ‘South Asian American’ does not indicate a monolithic whole, but rather a collection of differences that are often more compelling and significant than any similarities” (192). Of the South Asian nations, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh share similarities in ethnicity and culture, certainly before the British partition of India in 1947 and the separation of Pakistan from Bangladesh in 1971.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century no other branch of American literature seems to have experienced such a great revival as Asian American writing, and in the immediate wake of the publication of works such as Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* and Amy Tan’s *The Joy Luck Club*, there have appeared a good number of critical studies of individual authors and studies of a general and theoretical nature. However, the first major critical work, Elaine Kim’s *Asian American Literature: An Introduction to the Writings and Their Social Context*, did not appear until 1982. In the approximately two decades since then, numerous anthologies of Asian American literature have been published for classroom use; hundreds of articles have been printed in significant journals and books; and dozens of book-length studies of individual authors or groups have been published by major university and commercial presses throughout the country, most notably on the West Coast but also in the Northeast.

To better situate and contextualize this reference guide, I now briefly consider a dozen or so critical and scholarly works in Asian American literary studies. Elaine Kim’s *Asian American Literature* is influential because as a groundbreaking work, it first drew the boundaries, however tentative and porous, for an emerging literature. Kim considers Asian American writing generally and Chinese and Japanese American literature particularly; she mentions some Korean and Filipino American authors but takes no note of Vietnamese, Indian, or South Asian American writing. Amy Ling’s *Between Worlds: Women Writers of Chinese Ancestry* (1990), as the title indicates, deals with one ethnic group—Chinese Americans, and one gender—women writers such as the Eaton sisters, Lin Tai-yi, Hazel Lin, Diana Chang, Mai-Mai Sze, and Maxine Hong Kingston. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward Jr.’s *Redefining American Literary History* (1990) is the first study of its kind that attempts to redefine the canon of American literature from a multiethnic, cross-cultural, and comparative perspective, and is useful in the study of U.S. minority literatures; it includes three chapters and a bibliography on Asian American literature.

Shirley Lim and Amy Ling’s *Reading the Literatures of Asian America* (1992) is a collection of critical essays that addresses vital issues in literature written by major Asian subgroups. Sau-ling Cynthia Wong’s *Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance*

(1993), called “the first comprehensive book on Asian American literature” since Kim’s study, engages topics such as tradition, the practice of reading Asian American literature, and its distinction from mainstream and other minority literatures. King-Kok Cheung’s *Articulate Silences: Hisaye Yamamoto, Maxine Hong Kingston, Joy Kogawa*, also published in 1993, is a study of the thematic and rhetorical uses of silence in the fiction of these three Asian North American women novelists. *Racism, Dissent, and Asian Americans from 1850 to the Present* (1993), edited by Philip Foner and Daniel Rosenberg, is an illuminating documentary history of Asian America, especially useful for its historicizing and contextualizing material relevant to the government’s treatment of Asian Americans.

Another collection, John Maitino and David Peck’s *Teaching American Ethnic Literature* (1996), consists of nineteen essays that deal with four major ethnic literatures; a chapter is devoted to each of five Asian American fiction writers: Bulosan, Kingston, Kogawa, Tan, and Yamamoto. *Immigrant Acts* (1996), by Lisa Lowe, approaches Asian American history and literature from the viewpoints of immigration and citizenship, arguing that the racialized foundations of both the United States as a nation and the development of American capitalism must be understood in the light of Asian immigration. Asian American literature to a great extent reflects the struggles that Asians in America have to endure to gain citizenship and achieve constitutional rights, to be “equal” with members of the mainstream culture. King-Kok Cheung’s *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature* (1997), a more comprehensive project consisting of eleven essays alphabetically arranged by national origins, provides useful overviews of literature by Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, South Asian, and Vietnamese Americans. The second part deals with major political, theoretical, and cultural issues: nationalism and postcolonialism, immigration and diaspora, and gender and identity.

Jinqi Ling’s *Narrating Nationalism: Ideology and Form in Asian American Literature* (1998), on the other hand, considers five texts: Okada’s *No-No Boy*, Louis Chu’s *Eat a Bowl of Tea*, Frank Chin’s two plays, *The Chickencoop Chinaman* and *The Year of the Dragon*, and Kingston’s *China Men*. Historical and theoretical issues are discussed in the first and final chapters of the book, where the author proposes a reconceptualization of the relationship between the past and the present of post-World War II Asian American literary history. David Leiwei Li’s *Imagining the Nation: Asian American Literature and Cultural Consent* (1998), like Lisa Lowe’s book, places contemporary Asian American literary production in the context of citizenship, revealing the historical contradiction of a United States caught between the utopian impulses of democratic consent and the residual practice of national inheritance. Li also offers analyses of *The Woman Warrior* and of the polemical views presented in the anthology *Aiiieeeee!*, refuting the controversial “Asian American sensibility” that the editors (Frank Chin et al.) advocate through their choices of works. Li’s discussion of “national” and “transnational,” “identity” and “difference” not as binary oppositions but as mutually constitutive concepts sheds light on the formative process of Asian American literature. David Palumbo-Liu’s *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (1999), a theory- and issue-oriented study, seeks to read the history of Asian Americans’ proximity to the ideal of a white totality as a series of reconfigurations and transgressions of the Asian/American “split.”

While the quantity and quality of these publications strongly attest to the intense ongoing interest in the field, until now there has been no guide to post-World War II Asian American literature accessible to both the general reading public and the more specialized

audience; therefore, this combination of overviews on major genres, authors, and works, with an A–Z reference section, is a timely effort. This book is meant to be a combined survey and reference work that offers concise information to readers who wish either to obtain a general sense of literary developments or to simply broaden their knowledge of this literature from 1945 to the present. Breadth, comprehensiveness, accuracy, and specificity will be its main characteristics.

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The Columbia Guide to Asian American Literature Since 1945 consists of three main parts: an introductory narrative overview, an A–Z reference section, and a selected bibliography of secondary sources. The overview surveys literary developments in Asian American literature from 1945 to the present. The A–Z reference section—the bulk of the book—deals with six genres, in alphabetical order: anthologies, autobiographies/memoirs, drama, fiction, poetry, and short fiction; each entry (except for anthologies) is followed by bibliographical information on studies of individual authors. The following discussion is keyed to these genres as well. The selected bibliography at the end of the book mainly covers works of a more general nature, such as literary criticism and histories, reference works, and collections of essays.

For coherence and ease of reference, entries on writers are listed alphabetically (only the section on anthologies is arranged chronologically), and when possible, include information on ethnicity or national origin intended to facilitate understanding of the subjects' cultural, racial, intellectual, and biographical background, while providing a chance for comparison between authors with similar backgrounds. Cross-referencing is also used, as many writers tend to engage in several genres. For example, Meena Alexander is primarily considered a poet, but she is also accomplished as a novelist and memoirist, so the main entry on her is found under "Poetry," while her name is also listed under "Fiction" and in "Autobiographies/Memoirs." An inherently multiethnic project such as this is meant to help the reader grasp the concepts of race, ethnicity, nation, identity, and citizenship in a broad, transnational, and cross-cultural context. Likewise, the approach by genre gives a historical perspective on the evolution of Asian American literature. While this guide cannot offer the analytical or critical depth of specialized studies, it is better able to provide breadth of information on the writers and their works.