

**Wilson, Bernard, and Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, editors.**  
***Asian Children's Literature and Film in a Global Age: Local, National, and Transnational Trajectories.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 434 pages. ISBN 9789811526319.**

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**Recommended Citation:** Chong, Kyle L., and Emma X. Paulson. "Wilson, Bernard, and Sharmani Patricia Gabriel, editors. *Asian Children's Literature and Film in a Global Age: Local, National, and Transnational Trajectories.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 434 Pages. ISBN 9789811526329." *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2025.

Bernard Wilson's and Sharmani Patricia Gabriel's edited volume, *Asian Children's Literature and Film in a Global Age: Local, National and Transnational Trajectories* (2020), is a generative survey to grapple with the many uses and ways of engaging with children's literature and film situated in Asian contexts. Written primarily for an Asian Studies audience, the book's 16 chapters authored by mostly Asian scholars, are divided geographically into four sections—East, South and West, Southeast, and Diaspora—and contribute to scholarship about Asian children's literature and film.

Each chapter in *Asian Children's Literature and Film in a Global Age* addresses white, Eurocentric, Anglophone norms in children's literature. Across this edited volume, Wilson and Gabriel aim to “provide some sense of Asian agency” and “provide representations that go well beyond the exotic” (20) from an Asian Studies perspective. We come into this work as transnational adoptees raised on the US West Coast. We bring to this review our histories and perspectives as a non-transracial Taiwanese American adoptee and education scholar, and a transracial, transnational Chinese adoptee and a scholar of the sociology of race and Asian American film and media studies to examine this book from a critical Asian American studies and education perspective.

By highlighting literature and media created in Asian contexts, the book emphasizes how contexts conceptualize the role of children's literature and media in socializing, politicizing, and nationalizing children. At the same time, the book elucidates Asian concepts and historicizations of childhood itself by showing how onto-epistemological approaches inform the ways communities understand society's responsibilities to children, and their relationships to others.

In “East,” authors examine children's literature in Taiwan, China, South Korea, and Japan. The chapter “Children's Literature and Childhood Imagination in 1960's Taiwan: Jen-Mu

Pan and the Discourse of the ‘Child Heart’” by Andrea Mei-Ying Wu considers the Taiwanese concept of *tongxin*, or the “child heart,” as a guiding principle for the Editorial Task Force established within Taiwan’s Ministry of Education in 1964. Wu traces how the literary representation of childhood from the 1970’s to 2010’s reflects how Chinese Confucianist values interact with, reject, and respond to globalized ideas of children and parents. In their chapter “Parent and Parent-Child Relationships in Contemporary Chinese Children’s Literature (1978-2014),” Xiangshu Fang and Lijun Bi use historical, cultural, and social context of Confucianism, Communism, and modernization to describe how current children’s literature authors’ depiction of parent-child relationships has evolved between 1978 - 2014. “Society is a Family: Social Exclusion and Social Dystopia in South Korean Films” by Sung-Ae Lee examines how a prominent South Korean social value, society as a family, is represented in three films and critiques how the metaphor lends itself to a tepidity to paradigmatic social change without disrupting the metaphor. Fourth, Yasuko Doi analyzes representations of family models and framings of childhood in recent Japanese children’s literature by Iwakase Joko in “Family Diversity in Recent Japanese Children’s Literature.” The chapter focuses on Joko’s recent books and contributes implications for how literature can be a source of support for young readers experiencing divorce, estrangement, or distance in their families. Bernard Wilson concludes “East” in “Mutilation, Metamorphosis, Transition, Transcendence: Revisiting Genderism and Transgenderism in *The Little Mermaid Through Gake no Ue no Ponyo*” by contrasting the Disney and Studio Ghibli representations of (trans)gender(ing) and cis-heteropatriarchy in the context of Miyazaki Hayao’s and Shinto worldviews. Chapters in the “East” section expose readers to philosophies and concepts of childhood situated in East Asian contexts which disrupts persistent Western essentialism of co-called “Asian values.”

“South and West” includes four chapters based on children’s literature and media situated in India, Sri Lanka, and Iran. Sonia Ghalian historicizes Indian children’s film or films with children as primary subjects, and traces how representations of children have changed between the 1950s and the 2000s in “In the Shadows: Tracing Children and Childhood in Indian Cinema.” Suchismita Banerjee’s chapter “Engendering Identities: Gay and Lesbian Characters in Contemporary Indian English Young Adult Fiction” questions who gets to claim authenticity of voice in representing LGBTQIA+ people in Indian English young adult fiction. Throughout the chapter, Banerjee highlights the many intersecting power structures and influences on those representations, such as publication politics and nationalism. In “The Demon as ‘Other’ in Sri Lankan Children’s Literature: Rambukwella’s *Mythil’s Secret* and *Asiri’s Quest*,” Neluka Silva analyzes Prashani Rambukwella’s critiques of ethnic essentialism and aspirations towards pluralism in Sri Lanka. Finally, Amir Ali Nojournian and Ami Hadi Nojournian use poetic analysis in “Toward a Poetics of Childhood Ethics on Abbas Kiarostami’s Children’s Films” interpret how Abbas Kiarostami’s films encourage audiences to grapple with fluidities in what Iranian communities consider “normal” or “moral,” and children’s individualities, especially as they resist hegemonic or universalized norms. The chapters in “South and West” are among the most successful in the book’s goals to provide a sense of “agency” to authors and readers of children’s literature and film in Asian contexts. This section contributes analyses of literature and media that can counter colonial, dehumanizing, and Islamophobic Western media narratives about people from South and Western Asia, further amplified since Israel’s ongoing genocide in Gaza.

The “Southeast” section includes chapters on literature and media produced in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In “Folktale Adaptation and Female Agency: Reconfigurations of

*Mashuri* Legend in Selected Contemporary Malaysian Young Adult Fiction,” Sharifah Aishah Osman argues that contemporary young adult adaptations of the folktale *Mashuri* subvert nationalistic constructions of religious, gender, and racial norms as well as womxn’s agency in contemporary Malaysia. Herding Hakim’s chapter “Seeking ‘Unity in Diversity’: Contemporary Children’s Books in Indonesia” shows the ways recent Indonesian children’s literature wrestles with the aspirations of “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika” (“Unity in Diversity”) and “Pancasila” (“Five Principles”) in the context of Indonesia’s colonial history. Through analysis of ethnic stereotyping and animal character proxies in picturebooks, Hakim compares Indonesian and Western ideas of multiculturalism and the dangers of upholding “myths and stereotypes that inform Western modes of thought” (Bradford 12) about colonization that narrow what ideas like “multiculturalism” can look like. In “The Paradox of the Filipino Child: Realistic Philippine Children’s Stories (1990-2018),” Lalaine F. Yanilla Aquino considers inter-medial and multimodal storytelling around moralistic interactions between concepts of childhood and concepts of adulthood in 35 Filipino children’s books from 1990 to 2018. Gabriela Lee examines representation of digital online spaces in two Filipino young adult speculative fiction texts in “Through Screens and Streams: Digital Liminality and Identities in Philippine Young Adult Speculative Fiction” and argues that they provide needed context for understanding how young adults experiment with and develop their identity as they navigate moving between real and online worlds. Chapters about Southeast Asia, similar to the previous sections, offer important nuances that center the ways multiple ethnic communities coexist within a nation-state, and ways these nation-states use literature to promote ideals of multiculturalism and tolerance. These chapters also provide helpful contexts to how colonization continues to impact these nation-state

contexts in ways that shape literature and film which informs the ways both are produced and consumed in these contexts and beyond.

The book concludes with two chapters examining Asian diasporic content in the United States. Fengxia Tan's chapter, "Symbiotic Cultural Landscape: Retelling Chinese Folktales in Ed Young's Picture Books," highlights how Ed Young's literary oeuvre brings Chinese artistic traditions retells folktales for young readers. In "Hyphens, Hybrids and Bridges: Negotiating Third Spaces in Asian-American Children's Literature," Susan Aang argues that Asian American children's authors provide a "third space" for young readers to compare their lived experiences to their racial and national identities. The Diaspora section seeks to address the book's highly bordered organization by nation-states and nuances the "global" and "local" from previous chapters and focusing on Asian diasporic communities. Yet, this section declines to engage "the hybridity and multiplicity of diaspora consciousness" (He 5), and how "white supremacy racializes Asian Americans" (Iftikar and Museus 940) as an East Asian centered monolith.

As we consider Wilson and Gabriel's goal to provide nuanced representations of Asian children, the book's scope of analysis has strong potential to facilitate rich intertextual discussions across media. In particular, Wu's, Hakim's, Aquino's, and Tan's chapters highlight the interplay of ideology, policy, and pedagogy in children's socializations which helpfully disrupt the Western concepts and historicizations of childhood like those summarized in even "critical" introductions in children's literature textbooks. These chapters also provide an accessible entry point to their respective local contexts and show how texts embed and resist state discourses about childhood, ethnic, or national identity across borders. These chapters encourage students consider how each local context interprets ideas like ethnic or racial

difference and multiculturalism, which can differ from dominant US-centered discourses of social justice.

While no single volume can achieve Wilson and Gabriel's goal to demonstrate Asian agency, this starting point exposes a potential concern that the book starts from a place that implies Western scholars speak for Asian contexts. As a result, this implication can suggest Asian scholars currently have no agency to speak for or with their own contexts. The book's geographical organization also somewhat belies regional power dynamics within Asia, leaving missed opportunities in the "Diaspora" section to acknowledge how these dynamics move globally. While authors of many chapters resist orientalist and racist rhetorical positioning, Wilson and Gabriel's framing of their volume's goals can be read as a deficit orientation about Asian agency as "racialization of Asian diasporic peoples is often done in (explicit or implicit) positioning related to other racial groups" (Hsieh 223). As well, some chapters in asserting Asian authors' and creators' agency vary in their providing of needed context to those less familiar with a text or film's situatedness, leaving less space for readers to engage with the generative storytelling and agency that authors seek to analyze throughout (Vue et al. 56).

Further, many chapters' extensive use of Western scholars and theory (e.g. Emmanuel Levinas, Stuart Hall, and others) reveals the difficult balance in English-medium volumes such as this one that will be read by a predominantly Western audience but rightly seek to deepen global understandings of Asian children's literature and media. While some may read this as a reliance, we also understand the ways in which orientalist ideologies that persist in academia reinforce the "seminality" of certain scholarship. We applaud authors within this edited volume, as a result, for highlighting scholarship from their contexts and encouraging readers to engage with the many overlapping and interconnected histories of the places each chapter considers.

Given these considerations, *Asian Children's Literature and Film in a Global Age* has potential homes across multiple disciplines in addition to its primary audience in Asian Studies. In calling for children's literature scholars to push beyond "exotic" representation of Asian contexts to engage in standalone, Wilson and Gabriel successfully disrupt comparative analysis with Western or US-situated literature. Select chapters also helpfully explicate non-Western epistemological constructions of childhood—assumptions about which can ground analysis of children's literature itself.

As many American teacher education programs remain persistently US-centered, for example, this book can be positioned within them to teach about local contexts without centering whiteness. Geographic organization of this book can problematically silo contexts that have deeply interconnected histories into discrete zones; teaching these texts without this necessary context can "perpetuate stereotypes that position non-white groups as outsiders" (Rodríguez and Kim 17). Considering their own stated goals in *Asian Children's Literature and Film in a Global Age*, Wilson and Gabriel highlight important scholarship that not only underscores the ways Asian creators of children's literature and media prepare young readers to inherit the legacies of historical traumas, but also the joys and cultural assets from across the vast context known as Asia. This scholarship will only become more important as young people continue to engage in these histories and figure out who they want to be.



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