

The Movies of Racial Childhoods: Screening Self- Sovereignty in Asian/America by Celine Parreñas Shimizu (review)

180). Interestingly, these same technologies were used for film monsters that appeared at the same time too.

As part of the last chapter, Lee states that makeup technologies in film and later television and streaming services deserve additional, in-depth study, opening the door for a new generation of scholars to build on the small, but impactful yellowface literature. I also hope that Lee's work inspires other scholars to build on what she has done and take the analysis of yellowface in new directions. Yellowface is still with us, but, like the entertainment industry itself, is manifest in new forms.

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The Movies of Racial Childhoods: Screening Self-Sovereignty in Asian/America, by Celine Parreñas Shimizu. Duke University Press, 2024. xvii + 264 pp. \$27.95 paperback. ISBN 9781478025658.

As mainstream films centered around Asian/American characters and stories become more common, what constitutes positive representation remains a site of contestation. In *The Movies of Racial Childhoods*, Celine Parreñas Shimizu offers fresh analyses of recent, mostly independently produced films representing "Asian/American" children, using the label to indicate her "focus on the imbrication of Asia and America" that acknowledges the connections and tensions between the two (31). By focusing on a rarely highlighted category of characters within lesser-known films, she expands the scope of literature surrounding the issue of Asian/American representation in media. As a grieving mother writing

during the COVID-19 pandemic while isolated yet surrounded by anti-Asian sentiments, death, and grief, Shimizu dedicates her work to dealing with the loss of her own eight-year-old son and imagining what life could have been possible for him. Despite this personal orientation, with its interdisciplinary reach across topics of race, queerness, and psychoanalysis and its political timeliness, the work proves relevant for various audiences and is a valuable contribution to fields including Asian American studies, psychology, and media studies.

The most important theoretical concept organizing Shimizu's arguments is what she calls "agentic attunement." Defining it as "the act of attending to a child with their sovereignty, at that moment and in the future, in mind" (7), Shimizu deems understanding the concept crucial for reaching self-sovereignty in healthy adulthood for fictional children on screen and the real children of color they represent. Her theorization of the concept is derived from psychoanalysis refracted through Asian American studies, which enables her to pay specific "attention to racialized sexuality in representations" (19). She builds on Heinz Kohut's research on self psychology, in particular, which prioritizes agency and self-esteem in self-formation. However, she complicates the historically white male focus of psychoanalysis by incorporating awareness of racialization specific to Asian/American children: simultaneous premature adultification and perpetual infantilization which impede progress towards self-sovereignty. Shimizu amalgamates these two frameworks in asserting the applicability of agentic attunement to viewing, analyzing, and creating films featuring Asian/American childhoods, using the concept to explore the unique "visual language" (27) of filmic representation as a site that can establish "helpful narratives in child and adult development" (xv) beyond only being "sites of harm" (16). Presented in five chapters through Freud's case histories approach, her analyses of six protagonists demonstrate how vital promoting agentic attunement for Asian/American children is in enabling their creation of a healthy sense of self in various stages and forms of life.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the childhoods of three Asian/American characters struggling with fractured selves due to racial and class-based pressures regarding sexuality. Shimizu begins by showing that Andrew Cunanan from *American Crime Story: The Assassination of Gianni Versace* builds his life and personality on lies just as his father did in his childhood and consequently murders anyone who rejects this "false self" (48) he has created. Shimizu recognizes that he distrusts his queer, socially inadequate "true self" (61) that does not align with the heteronormative masculinity enforced both within and without his home. In chapter 2, Shimizu contrasts Cunanan's experience within an unaccepting environment against the development of David and Cody, characters of *Spa Night* and *Driveways* respectively who encounter affirming "selfobjects" which encourage agentic attunement in their "attempt to unify their fragmented selves" (89). By attributing the success of David and Cody's queer self-formations to their experiences with agentic attunement and Cunanan's violent failure to the lack thereof, these set the scene for the rest of the book by displaying the critical potential of agentic attunement as a method

of self-making for child characters fractured by intersectional race-class-sexuality struggles within and beyond film.

In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, Shimizu continues her conversation about sexuality and self-formation but also focuses on three Asian/American children's experiences of grief and mourning in order to highlight agentic attunement's role in promoting healing throughout childhood development. She points out that the characters of Maxie from *The Blossoming of Maximo Oliveros*, Rose from *Yellow Rose*, and Ellie Chu from *The Half of It* share the experience of losing their mothers but strive to maintain previously received agentic attunement or find other sources within their communities to continue growing into healthy adulthood. Through analyses of Maxie's understanding of their connection with poverty-induced criminality and Rose's quest for belonging in America as an immigrant, Shimizu explores specific solutions agentic attunement can provide for fictional and real children dealing with loss such as allowing maintenance of "healthy narcissism in the form of a grandiose self" (170). Shimizu also examines agentic attunement's usefulness in managing experiences of grief superimposed upon previously discussed societally exacerbated psychological struggles with sexuality in her analysis of Ellie Chu, further strengthening her argument that the concept is pivotal in empowering child characters to overcome struggles in self-formation shaped by various circumstances. These analyses reveal agentic attunement's continued importance throughout the entire process of childhood development, especially in its promotion of resilience in the face of hardships. Situated in a fertile moment of increased interest in Asian American mental health issues, Shimizu's work is particularly productive both in introducing a new method of analysis for filmic representations of Asian/American childhoods and encouraging readers to engage in personal reflection and healing regarding their own lives. In asserting that filmic representation can "give us freedom... from the persistent accounts of melancholia and pessimism in Asian/American cultural politics" (189), Shimizu attributes a hopeful overtone to her work that deviates from scholarships focused predominantly on loss, thereby making space to move towards an optimistic future. *The Movies of Racial Childhoods* provides an innovative, comprehensive, and touching interdisciplinary approach to examining the "hopeful generation" (189) of Asian/American childhoods in both the cinematic and worldly realms.

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