

Asian American Librarians and Library Services: Activism, Collaborations, and Strategies, edited by Janet Hyunju Clarke, Raymond Pun, and Monnee Tong

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Special Focus on Refusing Crisis Narratives

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Book Review: *Asian American Librarians and Library Services: Activism, Collaborations, and Strategies*

Clarke, Janet Hyunju, Raymond Pun, and Monnee Tong, eds. (2018). *Asian American Librarians and Library Services: Activism, Collaborations, and Strategies*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 396pp, \$67.00.

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Since the coronavirus outbreak, there have been a growing number of xenophobic and racist incidents targeting Asian Americans. Therefore, it is both timely and meaningful to be reviewing *Asian American Librarians and Library Service*, whose editors unequivocally argue that a strategic and systemic integration of diversity and inclusion in the LIS profession and libraries are critical and indispensable. This integration would allow for “the rich diversity of experiences and histories of Asian Americans in library and archival collections, services, and programming [to not only become] validated and recognized, but also valued and celebrated as vital components of the shared American experience” (xvi). This volume documents Asian Pacific American (APA) librarians’ work and their relentless advocacy for furthering diversity, inclusiveness and equal opportunities in the LIS profession as well as for the Asian American communities that they serve.

Asian American Librarians and Library Services is the first book covering APA librarianship, and this ambitious project was spearheaded by three co-editors, Janet Hyunju Clarke, Raymond Pun, and Monee Tong. Clarke is a past president of the Asian/Pacific American Librarians Association (APALA) and currently an associate dean for Research & User Engagement at Stony Brook University Libraries. Pun is an instruction and research librarian at Alder Graduate School of Education as well as an avid book reviewer for the ALA Booklist. Tong is a manager of sciences at the San Diego Central Library, and has dedicated her career to motivating and mentoring young adults through library programs. Altogether, the editors compiled



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43 chapters contributed by 54 qualified professionals, consisting of a mix of those with Asian American heritage, as well as non-Asian professionals who support Asian American communities through their work. These contributors come from different backgrounds and regions of the world, and their diverse perspectives and candid interviews enrich discussions in the book. This work was primarily written for APA librarians, library students, library staff, and faculty advising APA librarians, and takes the form of first-person narratives and interviews spread across three large sections.

In the first section titled, “Collections, Exhibits and Resources,” the first chapter provides the origin of Asian American literature and ethnic studies. Clarke describes the impact of the Third World Students strikes of the 1968-1969 in creation of ethnic studies and consequently, a shift in the “Literary Mode of Production” (5). This shift emancipated ethnic literature from the cultural hegemony that had perpetuated orientalist narratives onto Asian Americans through the Eurocentric influences and control over text selection and publication since the 19th century.

The rest of the chapters in this section present unique, meaningful, and purpose-driven APA collections and archives, and include insightful discussions on the impact of these resources on Asian American communities. Yu points to blatant cultural appropriation (58) and omissions of Asian American dancers in early American dance collections as well as the lack of the Library Congress Subject Headings (LCSH) and genre headings to describe Asian American dance in present day. This gap leads her to call on APA colleagues to provide access points to Asian American materials, which will not only save those materials from sinking into obscurity, but enhance their discoverability to support scholarship. According to Clarke, use of pejorative LCSH terms such as “illegal aliens” to describe undocumented immigrants, should be challenged by the APA librarian community (10). Mallick’s work on South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) is a fight against symbolic annihilation, to no longer be ascribed as an eternal outsider but to be recognized as an active participant in American history. Inkography—a digital repository about tattooed Asian Americans—challenges the mainstream media’s stereotype of Asians as the “model minority” (79), denounces racial essentializing, and portrays each individual as unique, with many intersecting identities. The purposes of the APA collections and archives in this section are to increase visibility and representation of minority perspectives, raise awareness of painful histories of the past, and to address and change some of the LCSH terms that are still pejorative and biased towards Asian Americans today.

The second section concerns library services, outreach, and programming in academic, public, school, and special library settings. For Honma, teaching critical

information literacy to undergraduate students entails praxis, upholding social justice and getting outside of the classroom to engage with local community to use local and culturally specific information. He provides an example of students' work on exposing poor housing conditions of Chinatown in Los Angeles through a zine they published (129). Jensen suggests providing "know your rights" information resources to immigrant, undocumented, and refugee students (198) as a strategy to transform the library into a safer space for users regardless of their background. Avery Le cites her own experience of microaggressions and their negative impact on psychological health, as she supports creating safe environments for Asian students with language barriers for their wellbeing and success. Her approach in adopting hyperawareness during reference interactions (176) to help Asian students is noteworthy. Multi-collaborative efforts are mentioned throughout this section to highlight engagements with minority groups. For example, Jerry Dear reflects on how forming alliances with community partners empowered public libraries (139) to run cultural events to raise awareness and foster appreciation for Asian Pacific Islander American (APIA) contributions in the country. In chapters 16 and 17, it is worth noting that both the Talk Story program (141) and the Dai Dai Xiang Chuan program (151) were borne out of past ALA President Camila Alire's Presidential Initiative. Among other achievements, Alire is known for her service to the Latino and Spanish speaking communities. Her support for Asian American communities here is outstanding as this serves as an important reminder that leaders have power to change and support minority communities in larger scale vis-à-vis national programs.

The last section concerning leadership and issues of "diversity and social justice, structural barriers, professional advancement, and community relevance" (xvii) offer consolation, encouragement, and a sense of camaraderie. To highlight a few, Qiu shares his experience of slipping deep into a funk (260) during his early career and then discovering personal vision through participating at the Minnesota Institute for Early Career Librarians (MIECL). It is empowering to see that for Adriene Lim, a successful Asian American library leader who experienced racism and classism, her best advice for great leadership is embracing empathy. She refers to Cindy Tripp to explain that with empathy, "you can better listen to the people...and you need to get to know them in human ways" (241). For Patty Wong, a successful APA leader is one who can mobilize and motivate others to make his or her organization resilient from a cultural competency perspective (356). Her ideas and advice on leadership are practical, invaluable, and will be a great resource for librarians.

The publication of this work is not just a symbolic success for the APA librarian community. The editors deserve credit for mobilizing 54 contributors and creating the opportunity for APA librarians to tell their stories and share their thoughts on

the past, present, and future of APA librarianship. This work is replete with notes and references to scholarly literature, and some chapters could be used as teaching materials for LIS courses that concern diversity, inclusion, and social justice issues.