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Cheryl Narumi Naruse. *Becoming Global Asia: Contemporary Genres of Postcolonial Capitalism in Singapore*. U of California P, 2023. Pp. xiv, 211. USD \$34.95.

Cheryl Narumi Naruse's *Becoming Global Asia: Contemporary Genres of Postcolonial Capitalism in Singapore* boldly breaks with interpretative approaches that have reproduced a static sense of the postcolonial hermeneutic

or resigned the framework solely to a politics of resistance. *Becoming Global Asia* suggests that just as the nation is a “variable form” (Naruse 10) subject to historically determined reconfigurations, so too is “postcolonialism” an uneven form that signifies diverse meanings at different historical moments while also activating contradictory modes of agency. *Becoming Global Asia* historicizes the 1997 Asian financial crisis as an absent cause conditioning the symptomatic dismissal of postcoloniality in most analyses of Asia within the contemporary capitalist world-system. But Asia’s staggering developmental reconfigurations in the decades following the infamous currency crisis demand an incisive retheorization of the continuities—both before and after 1997—between postcolonial nationalist narrations and global economic imperatives. Naruse’s first book does precisely that, and its publication marks a momentous contribution to materialist postcolonial studies.

Assessing the same national effects problematically described by some theorists as the “*post* postcolonial” (Ong 35; emphasis in original)—namely “state developmental strategies, rising standards of living, and the regulation of populations in a post-cold war order” (35)—Naruse instead identifies “the strategic ways in which states leverage their postcolonial status” in their “drive to global capitalism” (9). As one of the most significant conceptual contributions of *Becoming Global Asia*, “postcolonial capitalism” describes “how capitalist cultures are motivated, rationalized, and strategized through a consciousness of colonial subordination and racial capitalism, both past and present” (9). Naruse’s methodological approach examines how historical traumas and imperial subjugations get recontextualized and repurposed—not disavowed—in the service of globally oriented capitalist development. Postcolonial capitalism thus defines a distinct form of capitalist social relations wherein a nation reconceives its own imperative toward value accumulation as “a logical redress for colonialism” (16) or instrumentalizes specific differences, now as cultural capital, previously denigrated in processes of colonial othering. Naruse’s portable concept thus describes myriad contemporary economies in the Global South such as the Philippines and India, to cite just two examples, where business process outsourcing industries strategically rationalize their workers’ anglophonic aptitude as cultural capital by consciously acknowledging their countries’ respective histories of colonial subordination. However, Naruse’s case study is Singapore, and unlike most other postcolonial capitalist states, the island nation’s singular status is reflected in its being “lauded for its economic capital *and* regarded as a site with cultural capital” (4; emphasis in original).

Whereas other nations’ postcolonial capitalist policies might solely court the *productive* capacities of foreign direct investment, Naruse reveals how Singapore also paradigmatically narrates itself as an unparalleled site of

*consumptive* purchasing power, as “an alluring Asian setting for capitalist flourishing” (4). Taking the term from the developmentalist strategy of the government’s Economic Development Board (EDB), Naruse uses “Global Asia” to elucidate Singapore’s post-1997 transformation into both a hub for productive services in the global knowledge economy and an exemplary globalized site that projects “the fantasy of unfettered consumption” (122). While Naruse underscores how Global Asia functions as the Singaporean state’s most recent iteration of postcolonial capitalism (following the earlier eras of state developmentalism and “Asian Values”), her most crucial insight regarding the concept involves its overdetermined construction and interpretation. The production of the city-state as Global Asia results not only from the Singaporean government’s strategic activation of its former colonial status in the service of capitalist development but also Singapore’s representation within and “outsized influence on the global cultural imaginary” (145). This profound recognition of Singapore’s mutual constitution—at once national and international—as Global Asia therefore reveals an “aestheticized, transnationalized narrative that exceeds the Southeast Asian nation itself” (5). As her innovative genre study demonstrates, Naruse compellingly deploys an interpretative methodology that refuses to subordinate the aesthetic and narratological dimensions of “the globalized context in which Singapore’s nation formation is materializing” (35) to purely socioeconomic analyses.

*Becoming Global Asia* first examines the post-1965 emergence of the literary anthology genre that grappled with Singapore’s national legibility in an emergent global context. Earlier anthologies like Chandran Nair’s *Singapore Writing* (1977) utilize an “assimilative logic” (Naruse 24) meant to establish a newly independent Singapore’s “capacity for modernity and development” (24), while later collections like Pugalenthi Sr’s *Black Powers* (1991) assert difference and contest institutional imperatives to render Singapore legible to the world. Naruse enacts a particularly brilliant formalist analysis of the anthology’s distinction contra the postcolonial novel by linking the editorial considerations wherein “difference is brought together” (26) in curated literary collections to the problems of national cohesion given both Singapore’s historical separation from the Federation of Malaya and the city-state’s racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious heterogeneity. Turning to the post-1997 moment, Naruse next examines the genre of “the demographic compilation” (50), such as journalistic writing about overseas Singaporeans like *The Straits Times*’ “Singaporean Abroad” feature, and its unique instrumentalization of “population aesthetics” (50) that upend the Andersonian figure of the national hero through a flatness and seriality that paradoxically cultivates “deep attachments to the nation” (52). Producing a kind of diasporic character

*without* character, these compilations also exemplify a postcolonial capitalist approach that recognizes setting as “mired in and as an expression of power” (64). Appeals to cosmopolitanism therefore reflect a calculated statist aspiration for expanded economic maneuverability, not geopolitical domination.

Naruse then examines the emergence of the “coming-of-career narrative” (79), an iteration of the bildungsroman whose representations of corporate work capture the contradictions within the neoliberal formation of self. In an exceptional close reading of the mirror scene in Hwee Hwee Tan’s novel *Mammon Inc.* (2001), Naruse insists that what appears as the evacuation of statist imperatives in one’s motivation to labor and the concomitant neoliberal pleasure in identifying with one’s career actually reflect how “states and corporations operate in concert to compel labor from their subjects” (97). Concluding with what deserves to be the definitive account of Kevin Kwan’s novel *Crazy Rich Asians* (2014), Naruse interrogates the “princess fantasy” (114) that desires centrality, indulgence, and reverence. As the genre inverts the normative gender relations within the East-West geopolitical binary and derives pleasure from American declension, it mediates the shifting relations of power between Singapore and the United States. Via her analysis of Kwan’s work, Naruse arrives at the counterintuitive but compelling claim that a shorter, not longer, historical view of capitalist development in Singapore is necessary for both undoing “a historicism that centralizes the British Empire” (117) and a more thorough understanding of postcolonial capitalism’s order of operations.

Naruse’s profound interpretive insights have emerged at a moment in which the political and disciplinary stakes of her interventions could not be higher. Against Asian Tiger “miracle nations” (40) narratives that claim ahistorical autopoiesis and triumphalist accounts of US hegemonic decline that overlook the contracting temporalities of global capitalist accumulation more generally, *Becoming Global Asia* elucidates a crucial path forward that moves across area, Asian, American, and diasporic studies. Naruse’s book will no doubt become a seminal lodestar that guides the new methodologies and interpretative frameworks within transpacific studies and studies in Global Asias. As these interdisciplinary fields mature, *Becoming Global Asia* will have been there from the beginning—prompting us to always read for the variable and contrary within a “wayward postcolonialism” (11).

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#### Works Cited

Ong, Aihwa. *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*. Duke UP, 1999.