

Colonialism and Male Domestic Service across the Asia Pacific. By Julia Martínez, Claire Lowrie, Frances Steel and Victoria Haskins. (London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. xiv + 260 pp.)

Co-authored by Julia Martínez, Claire Lowrie, Frances Steel, and Victoria Haskins, *Colonialism and Male Domestic Service across the Asia Pacific* covers a broad geographic expanse, from the Philippines to Fiji to Jakarta, with numerous sites in-between. The four authors, who alternate as lead writers in different chapters, use the book's format to their advantage, despite the challenges that its organization might pose. Emphasizing "trans-colonial" employment practices, the book contends that domestic workplaces in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Pacific can be linked by tracing how employers in different locales collectively believed in the importance of male servants to their colonial projects. Previous studies of male domestic service in Asia, they explain, have elided discussions of "the mobility of ideas and practices between colonial sites and across empires" (p. 2). While the use of male servants became, in the minds of colonizers, a social relationship that codified the racial differences of Asian men willing to perform labor marked feminine, this perception conveniently overlooked both the long history of male servants in Europe and the migrations that imperial powers facilitated, which made Asian men procurable as a source of labor in different hubs and ports of colonial settlement.

European powers were keen on making Chinese and Indian male migrants available as a workforce that could be used in domestic service because Europeans were wary of relying on indigenous laborers whom they believed were more resistant, less qualified, and harder to keep in service. Indigenous workers' dispossession from the land and the immediate resentment this created, as well as colonial laws that regulated where they could live and work in Australia and Fiji, also contributed to the perceived desirability of imported labor. While colonial employers did attempt to pit different groups of Asian domestic workers against each other, they found it nearly impossible to police day-to-day interactions and intimacies, which led to cultural exchanges among indigenous and migrant workers that more narrowly focused histories of imperialism in Asia have neglected.

The authors stress how the production of colonial domesticity in the Asia Pacific occurred in multiple venues. Often, colonialism had less to do with establishing the private home as a fixed and stable bulwark for white colonists' reproduction and more to do with ensuring that metropolitan

standards of comfort could be found in long-distance steamship travel and hotel sojourns. In these contexts, the male Asian servant became an important figure that commercial concerns used to promulgate visions of exotic colonial lifestyles, made possible by Asian “boys” catering to the traveler’s every demand. In practice, hotel and steamship stewards, freed from the intimate controls that defined domestic service in private homes, were more successful in organizing and exercising autonomy on-and-off the job.

Histories of domestic service have always had to contend with the absence of workers’ voices and the difficulties that attend to “getting closer to the motivations and concerns of servants” (p. 21). The authors’ attention to servants’ agency is creatively foregrounded in Chapters 4 and 7. Chapter 4 unearths photographs where Asian servants seized control over their visual representation and used dress and composition as “a means of talking back to employers” (p. 131), thereby contesting stereotypes about their emasculation, docility, and primitiveness. Chapter 7, in a section on Vietnam, calls attention to the importance that Phan Boi Chau, the nationalist revolutionary, assigned to servants as an underground network who spied on French officials. Chinese servants in Hong Kong engaged in similar acts of solidarity against the British colonial regime there.

Far ranging, *Colonialism and Male Domestic Service across the Asia Pacific* provides an excellent collection of case studies that highlight the cultural, economic, and political significance of male domestic service in the Asia Pacific. It offers a model for linking specific sites of intimate labor to what became shared strategies for the gendered and racial division of labor across imperial regimes.

Rutgers University

ANDREW URBAN

The Chinese Lady: Afong Moy in Early America. By Nancy E. Davis.
(New York, Oxford University Press, 2019. xii + 332 pp.)

Nancy Davis’s scrupulously researched and elegantly written monograph on Afong Moy, the first known Chinese woman in the United States, provides a fresh look at American culture in the Jacksonian Era. Although early American fascination with the live exhibition of the “Chinese Lady” has been noted by scholars, Davis is the first to trace Afong Moy’s entire career in great detail. As she follows Afong Moy’s journey from Guangzhou to New York, Charleston, Havana, New Orleans, and Pittsburgh, among many other