

**Amy Sueyoshi.** *Discriminating Sex: White Leisure and the Making of the American*

*&quot;Oriental&quot;*. Asian American Experience Series. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018. x + 212 pp. \$99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-252-04178-5.

**Reviewed by** Chrissy Lau

**Published on** H-SHGAPE (April, 2019)

**Commissioned by** William S. Cossen (The Gwinnett School of Mathematics, Science, and Technology)

During the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, San Francisco had the popular reputation as a sexually liberal wonderland and an international city. At the same time, during the era of increasing nativism and immigration exclusion, San Francisco was also the city where Chinese and Japanese immigrants faced legal discrimination, marked by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which excluded Chinese laborers, and the 1907-8 Gentlemen's Agreement, which excluded Japanese laborers. Amy Sueyoshi's *Discriminating Sex: White Leisure and the Making of the American "Oriental"* puts these two seemingly unrelated and contradictory truths in connection with one another through a much-needed study of American Orientalism using an intersectional lens of race, gender, and sexuality. Contrary to popular belief that San Francisco was a freewheeling, wide-open town, Sueyoshi makes three interrelated arguments addressing multiple histories. First, she addresses the cultural and social history of San Francisco by identifying how the wide-open town was full of contradictions. Second, by arguing that Chinese and Japanese immigrants began as distinct groups in the minds of many Americans and later merged into a homogenous grouping of the Oriental, Sueyoshi examines the presumptions about race and panethnicity in Asian American history. Finally,

she asserts that white San Franciscans worked out their anxieties as well as expanded their sexuality and gender roles onto gendered and sexual tropes of Chinese and Japanese subjects, illuminating how Orientalism fits into histories of gender and sexuality in the United States.

Sueyoshi uses a wide array of sources, including more than one thousand newspapers, literary journals, plays, felony case files, immigration files, and oral histories. Her time period focuses on 1890 to 1924, the period of East Asian immigration leading up to full exclusion as well as the period of urbanization and industrialization. Sueyoshi focuses on cultural sites of curiosities and fascination. I believe her most creative analysis comes out of her examination of newspapers and plays, in which she uses the historical framework of Orientalism to understand the San Franciscan fascination with Chinese and Japanese gender and sexuality. For example, I appreciate her approach to an analysis of news stories of Chinese and Japanese immigrants as reflections of cultural and social anxieties of gender and sexual promiscuity in white America. In essence, these news stories say much more about San Francisco and the aspiring values and freedoms of its white residents than about Japanese and Chinese immigrants themselves. Moreover, Sueyoshi analyzes plays like *The*

*Geisha* (1897) and *The First Born* (1886) to show how representations of Japanese and Chinese women mirrored anxieties around the expansion of independence for white womanhood, particularly the rise of the Modern Woman and fears over white slavery. This cultural history illuminates the core of the book's main argument: the open and free sexuality of white people often came at the expense of othering Asian immigrants.

The chapters are thematic and build on one another. The first chapter, "A Peculiar Obsession," begins by asserting that San Franciscans clearly differentiated between the villainous Chinese and Japanese immigrants with cultural cache, laying the canvas for which white San Franciscans would explore their gender and sexuality. In the second chapter, "A Wide-Open Town?," Sueyoshi illustrates that San Francisco's reputation of being a wide-open town that allowed interracial marriage and sexual permissiveness flourished precisely because it did not threaten the dominance of white heterosexuality. In the third chapter, "Deliver Me from the Brainy Woman," the author examines how the prolific images of traditional femininity embodied in the Japanese geisha arose in order to counteract the expansion of white women's freedom through the Modern Woman. The fourth chapter, "Prostitution Proliferates," explores how anxieties around white women's assertive sexuality were explored through debates over immoral Chinese prostitution. In the fifth chapter, "Managing Masculinity," the author describes how questions about white masculinity and ideal manliness were explored through divergent characterizations of Chinese and Japanese masculinity in stark contrast as either savage or genteel. The sixth chapter, "Mindful Masquerades," explains that Japanese and Chinese immigrants never became fully accepted for cross-dressing, but the proliferation of a variety of white masquerades gave the illusion of open ideals while reinforcing white power and gender normativity. In the seventh chapter, "Conscience

Aroused," Sueyoshi describes that as discussions over explorations of gender and sexuality waned and sexual morality rose, the Chinese and Japanese subjects merged into the immoral pan-ethnic American "Oriental." In the epilogue, "Homosexuality as Asian," Sueyoshi argues that the Oriental became an avenue through which white men could explore illicit sexuality otherwise closed off to them.

Sueyoshi contributes an intersectional analysis of race, gender, and sexuality to what we think we already know about Asian American history and US histories of women, gender, and sexuality. First, she introduces new ways to think about Orientalism in the sites of gender and sexuality. While much of the scholarship has traced how Chinese and Japanese exclusion expanded the economic freedom of whites, Sueyoshi's research adds another dimension in that popular images of Chinese and Japanese sexuality helped to expand the sexual freedom of whites. Moreover, while scholarship in Asian American women's history has become more abundant, histories of Asian American gender and sexuality have been left wanting. This book is a big step toward filling that gap and provides a model for how to approach an intersectional cultural history. Secondly, in US histories of women, gender, and sexuality, Sueyoshi demands that historians pay attention to how Orientalism functioned to expand a freewheeling sexually open culture among white San Franciscans. In this way, the relationality between white liberals and the Oriental is both racially and sexually exploitative. Scholars and students interested in race, gender, and sexuality in US history should read this important cultural history.

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**Citation:** Chrissy Lau. Review of Sueyoshi, Amy. *Discriminating Sex: White Leisure and the Making of the American &quot;Oriental&quot;*. H-SHGAPE, H-Net Reviews. April, 2019.

**URL:** <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=53142>



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