

IN CELEBRATION OF  
ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN  
HERITAGE MONTH  
NEW & NOTABLE BOOKS  
A SURVEY BY TERRY HONG

What? It was already May again? Sign of old age when a year just whooshes by! May means Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, which means a whole new list of books to share.

The best news is that publishers are putting out more and more books by and about Asian Pacific Americans (as well as Asian writers in translation), in such record numbers that—and here's the shameful sad news—I just can't keep up with all those pages. Still, my greedy fingers will always keep reaching for that next book.

ADULT FICTION

**Haunting Bombay**

SHILPA AGARWAL

*Soho*, \$24.00 cloth, ISBN 978-1-56947-558-4

Pinky Mittal, a schoolgirl in 1960s Bombay, lives with her extended family, protected by her matriarch grandmother, who rescued her as a toddler after her mother's death. Late one night, Pinky does the forbidden and opens the creaky bolted door ... and unleashes a vengeful spirit. Secrets emerge, lies are repeated, truth is obscured, and no one in the family is safe from harm.

**Almost Single**

ADVAITA KALA

*Random House*, \$13.00 paper,  
ISBN 978-0-553-38610-3

Much to her mother's chagrin, Aisha is almost 30 and (horrors!) still single. Working as the guest relations manager of a swanky Delhi hotel, she knows all about fast-paced city life. Who has time for romance with so much drama around? Until, of course, Mr. Right presents himself ... in the buff, no less, unintentional as that was!

**The Piano Teacher**

JANICE Y.K. LEE

*Penguin*, \$25.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-670-02048-5

Something about Lee's debut whispers, "Watch me." Populated with a cast

REVIEWER: **Terry Hong** is media arts consultant for the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Program. Visit her new Smithsonian book blog at <http://bookdragon.si.edu/>.

of "wandering global voyagers" are two intertwined stories, set 11 years apart, sharing the same leading man. In 1952 Hong Kong, the eponymous piano teacher, Claire Pendleton, a newly married émigré, finds herself involved with transplant Will Truesdale. Roll back to 1941 when Truesdale was the fresh arrival, claimed immediately by mixed-race heiress Trudy Liang. Lee seamlessly directs the reader through both affairs, creating a gorgeous epic of haunting images, lost secrets, and the too often inhumane cost of survival.

**The Vagrants**

YIYUN LEE

*Random House*, \$25.00 cloth,  
ISBN 978-1-4000-6313-0

Full disclosure: This is one of the most heartbreaking books you'll probably ever read. But read it you should. A young woman, a political victim of post-Mao China, is about to die. While her voice remains missing throughout the novel, the residents of remote Muddy River, affected by her life and ensuing death, are vividly brought to tragic life: her suffering mother, her resigned father, a pitifully crippled 12-year-old girl, a wandering older couple with a history of rescuing abandoned baby girls, a privileged government news announcer, and many more.

**In Other Rooms, Other Wonders**

DANIYAL MUEENUDDIN

*Norton*, \$23.95 cloth, ISBN 978-0-393-06800-9

This debut collection is a gift. In eight intertwined stories, Mueenuddin captures the lives of the haves and have-nots with both precision and grace. The collection's characters revolve around the elderly K.K. Harouni, whose extensive holdings begin in a Pakistani village and emanate far beyond. Nawab the electrician gains local status by securing himself a motorcycle; Jaglani the skimming land manager succumbs to love late in life; socialite Lily hopes to change her meaningless rituals with marriage; and wandering Rezak falls victim to kind intentions.

**Miles From Nowhere**

NAMI MUN

*Penguin*, \$21.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-1-59448-854-2

Mun's debut is the disturbing but ultimately hopeful story of runaway Joon, a Korean American teenager whose father abandons the family, whose mother loses her sanity, and who must somehow sur-

vive the unprotected streets of 1980s New York.

**The Weight of Heaven**

THRITY UMRIGAR

*HarperCollins*, \$25.99 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-06-147254-1

Frank and Ellie Benton have the unthinkable happen: Their seven-year-old son dies. In a desperate effort to escape the many reminders, Frank moves the couple to a small town in India to work for a division of his American employer. Their new life is not balm enough for their unfathomable grief, and their emotional estrangement threatens to destroy what's left of their relationship forever.

**English**

WANG GANG

Translated From the Chinese by  
MARTIN MERZ & JANE WEIZHEN PAN  
*Penguin*, \$24.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-670-02059-1

At 12, Love Liu lives with his architect parents in the village of Ürümchi in northeastern China. Growing up during the Cultural Revolution means he's surrounded by discontent and fear—everyone must always be diligently wary of what they say, what they do, even what they think. When Second Prize Wang arrives with his big-city Shanghai ways to teach English, he brings glimpses of another world. For Love Liu, the teacher's English dictionary becomes a symbol of infinite new possibilities.

**Everything Asian**

SUNG J. WOO

*Thomas Dunne/Macmillan*, \$23.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-312-53885-9

Loosely woven together with revealing vignettes about the interconnected characters that share 12-year-old protagonist Dae Joon's world, Woo's debut is a well-stitched story cloth filled with tenderness and warmth. After five years apart, Dae Joon (soon to be David), his sister In Sook (soon to be Susan), and their mother arrive from Korea to be reunited with their near-stranger of a father, who now runs an Asian import gift shop in a small New Jersey mall. Alternately painful and funny, this novel captures the disorientation of a young boy caught amidst difficult family dynamics, negotiating a strange new world filled with both loss and discovery.

## Once the Shore: Stories

PAUL YOON

Sarabande, \$15.95 paper,  
ISBN 978-1-932511-70-3

This breathtaking collection of eight interlinked stories creates a visceral portrait of lost souls who inhabit Yoon's fictional Solla Island off the Korean peninsula. The title story, rightfully chosen for inclusion in *Best American Short Stories 2006*, traces the unlikely relationship between an American widow and a young hotel waiter. An elderly couple search for their son's remains in "Among the Wreckage"; a runaway childhood lover returns home in middle age in "Faces to the Fire"; and a troubled woman is convinced of her missing childhood companion's return in "And We Will Be Here."

### ADULT NONFICTION

## Japanese American Resettlement Through the Lens

*Hikaru Carl Iwasaki and the WRA's Photographic Section, 1943-1945*

LANE RYO HIRABAYASHI

Photographs by HIKARU CARL IWASAKI

Foreword by NORMAN Y. MINETA

University Press of Colorado, \$34.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-87081-928-5

Amazingly, the War Relocation Authority (WRA) generated some 17,000 photos of Americans of Japanese ancestry who spent World War II in prison camps for little more than looking like the enemy. Of these photos, Hirabayashi looks at the experience of Japanese American resettlement—the process by which the unjustly imprisoned Americans were released from camps and reentered mainstream society—and provides historical context behind the disturbingly smiling images of these persecuted Americans.

## China Witness

XINRAN

Translated from the Chinese by  
JULIA LOWELL, NICKY HARMAN &  
ESTHER TYLDESLEY

Knopf, \$28.95 cloth, ISBN 978-0-375-42547-9

Since her 2002 bestseller *The Good Women of China*, Beijing-born, London-based journalist Xinran has emerged as an international dynamo reclaiming the voices of neglected citizens throughout her homeland. In her latest and most ambitious work, Xinran sifts through two decades of research to present 20 "ordinary people ... who would otherwise lack the fame, money and rank to get their ... astonishing experiences heard,"

filling the book's pages with unique glimpses of the "real China."

### GRAPHIC NOVELS

## Color of Earth

KIM DONG HWA

Translated From the Korean by LAUREN NA

First Second Books, \$16.95 paper,

ISBN 978-1-59643-458-5

## Color of Water

KIM DONG HWA

Translated From the Korean by LAUREN NA

First Second Books, \$16.95 paper,

ISBN 978-1-59643-459-2

The first two books in a trilogy by *manhwa* (Korean graphic novel) master Kim introduce English readers to two generations of strong women—a beautiful widowed mother and her blossoming teenage daughter—intimately sharing their lives in early 20th-century Korea. While the mother, who runs the local village tavern, finally finds new love with a handsome traveling salesman, daughter Ewha discovers first love, although true love only comes with lucky #3. Their dual story is told through intricate, exquisite panels. Keep an eye out for *Color of Heaven* in September.

## A Drifting Life

TATSUMI YOSHIHIRO

Edited & Designed by ADRIAN TOMINE

Translated From the Japanese by

TARO NETTLETON

Drawn & Quarterly, \$29.95 paper,

ISBN 978-1-8972997-4-6

This autobiographical epic is truly a portrait of an artist as a young man, done *manga* style. A child of 10 in postwar Japan, Hiroshi—Tatsumi's pseudonymous stand-in—makes manga obsessively. His regularly winning contest submissions soon bring him acclaim, even access to the legendary "grandfather of manga," Osamu Tezuka. Capturing 15 years, *A Drifting Life* follows Hiroshi from Osaka to Tokyo, a determined young boy who becomes one of the most influential Japanese graphic artists in history.

## The Eternal Smile

GENE LUEN YANG & DEREK KIRK KIM

First Second Books, \$16.95 paper,

ISBN 978-1-59643-156-0

From two of the most successful names in contemporary graphic novels—Gene Luen Yang, whose *American Born Chinese* was the first graphic novel to be a National Book Award finalist, and Derek Kirk Kim, the equally multi-award-winning author of the ground-

breaking *Same Difference and Other Stories*—comes an entertaining joint venture that features three stories in one. Expect the unexpected!

## Secret Identities

*The Asian American Superhero Anthology*

Edited by JEFF YANG, PARRY SHEN,

KEITH CHOW & JERRY MA

New Press, \$21.95 paper,

ISBN 978-1-59558-398-7

The *SI* boys gather some of the top names in Asian American pop culture to present a unique anthology of the Asian American experience, complete with masked crusaders, caped champions, and even everyday heroes. Together, they're making our ever-morphing, multi-cultural American future a safer, more inclusive place for *all* our kids!

### MIDDLE SCHOOL & YOUNG ADULT READERS

## Where the Mountain Meets the Moon

GRACE LIN

Little, Brown, \$16.99 cloth,

ISBN 978-0-3161142-7-1

Determined to change her family's lack of fortune, spunky and independent Minli sets out in search of the Old Man of the Moon high atop Never-Ending Mountain. Along the way, she meets a dragon who can't fly but knows how to be a true friend. In the end, real fortune has to do with *thankfulness* ... a perfect reminder for us all, packaged in a glowing, memorable read.

## The Great Call of China

CYNTHEA LIU

Penguin, \$7.99 paper, ISBN 978-0-142-41134-6

Born in China and raised by loving adoptive parents in Dallas, teenager Cece is on her way to China for a summer anthropology program in Xi'an, home of the legendary terra-cotta warriors. But in addition to seeking college credits, Cece is determined to find some answers about her birth parents. With the help of resourceful new friends, Cece has the cultural—and personal—experiences of her life.

## Shine, Coconut Moon

NEESHA MEMINGER

Simon & Schuster, \$16.99 cloth,

ISBN 978-1-41695-495-8

Four days after 9/11, a man wearing a turban shows up on Samar's doorstep—and turns out to be her uncle. After years of estrangement, he's determined to reunite the fractured family and, in the process, teach Sam about her Sikh American heritage, which threatens to

upend her comfortable life à deux with her divorced mother.

### **Claire and the Bakery Thief**

JANICE POON

*Kids Can Press*, \$15.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-1-55453-286-5;  
\$7.95 paper, ISBN 978-1-55453-245-2

### **Claire and the Water Wish**

JANICE POON

*Kids Can Press*, \$15.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-1-55453-381-7;  
\$7.95 paper, ISBN 978-1-55453-382-4

City girl Claire reluctantly moves to the country, where her parents open an all-organic bakery. During her first summer, she saves her kidnapped mother with the help of her new best friend, Jet. When the school year begins, she helps expose toxic dumping by a nearby company and becomes a local hero.

### **Tales From Outer Suburbia**

SHAUN TAN

*Scholastic*, \$19.99 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-545-05587-1

From the genius mind that brought you the wordlessly exquisite bestseller *The Arrival* comes a collection of 15 short stories for all ages, uniquely illustrated in Tan's signature enigmatic style. The second story, "Eric," about a visit by a foreign exchange student like no one has ever seen, ends in a delightful gasp of pure joy.

### **Absolutely Maybe**

LISA YEE

*Scholastic*, \$16.99 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-439-83844-3

Maybelline Mary Katherine Mary Ann Chestnut, aka "Maybe," escapes the clutches of her slimy stepfather-to-be, for whom her ex-beauty-queen, alcoholic mother insists she'll walk down the aisle a seventh time. Maybe decides it's high time to find her real father, the one man her mother didn't marry. She grabs her best friend and hitches a ride cross-country with a third friend who's bound for film school in Los Angeles, where finding Daddy turns out to be much harder than Maybe ever imagined.

### **FOR THE YOUNGER KIDDIES ...**

#### **Tan to Tamarind**

*Poems About the Color Brown*

MALATHI MICHELLE IYENGAR

Illustrated by JAMEL AKIB  
*Children's Book Press*, \$16.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-89239-227-8

A joyful celebration of all sorts of brown-tinted skin colors, reflected in the tan of a spicy *masala* chai to the coffee

brown of *café con leche*. In the author's note, poet Iyengar recalls being taunted for her brown skin and later finding pride in the "wonderful stories and poems about the color brown, written by and about proud brown people."

### **When the Moon Forgot**

JIMMY LIAO

English Text Adapted by  
SARAH L. THOMSON  
*Little, Brown*, \$17.99 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-3161139-0-8

When the moon fails to rise one night and continues to stay away, many moons are manufactured so everyone can have one of their own. But only one boy carefully nurtures his moon, which beams with the boy's unwavering love, until eventually the moon grows independent enough to shine once more.

### **A Party in Ramadan**

ASMA MOBIN-UDDIN

Illustrated by LAURA JACOBSEN  
*Boyd Mills*, \$16.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-1-59078-604-8

When Leena is invited to Julia's pony party, which happens to fall on the first Friday of Ramadan, she decides she will go anyway and just not eat or drink. During the month of Ramadan, observant Muslims fast during the day as a sign of gratitude and perform good deeds to feel closer to God. At the party, Leena realizes just how difficult not eating or even taking a small drink of water is. When she finally breaks the fast with her family, she is that much more grateful for the blessings of her life.

### **Cycle of Rice, Cycle of Life**

*A Story of Sustainable Farming*

JAN REYNOLDS

*Lee & Low*, \$19.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-1-60060-254-2

The planting and harvesting of the core food product of Bali, rice, are exercises in careful natural balance by the local farmers. But when the government gets involved and introduces genetically modified hybrid rice and chemical fertilizers, the perfect cycle breaks and crops fail miserably. Going back to the natural traditions proves the only sustainable answer.

### **Erika-san**

ALLEN SAY

*Houghton Mifflin*, \$17.00 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-618-88933-4

The Caldecott Medal-winning Allen Say's latest picture book is as gorgeous as his others. As a child, Erika sees a

framed picture of Japan and announces, "I want to go there when I grow up." She studies Japanese, gets herself a teaching job in Japan, and settles on a small remote island. She meets and befriends a fellow teacher, relishes her new life, and comes to realize that she is "home at last."

### **Sacred Mountain Everest**

CHRISTINE TAYLOR-BUTLER

*Lee & Low*, \$19.95 cloth,  
ISBN 978-1-60060-255-9

This is an informative look, underscored with lively photographs, at the history and future of Mount Everest, a sacred place for the locals, overtaken by adventurous tourism and currently suffering the high price of so-called modern progress.

### **Homegrown House**

JANET WONG

Illustrated by E.B. LEWIS  
*Simon & Schuster*, \$16.99 cloth,  
ISBN 978-0-68984-718-9

Grandmom has had two houses in her 65 years—and 40 years to make her current house "homegrown"—and an eight-year-old girl already has lived in three. While her parents dream about the next move to somewhere sleeker and bigger, the determined little girl gets busy with lessons learned from Grandmom in making her house homegrown, too. ■