

# Review of *Constellating Home: Trans and Queer Asian American Rhetorics*

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Hsu, V. Jo. *Constellating Home: Trans and Queer Asian American Rhetorics*. The Ohio State University Press, 2022.

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Where is home? What is home? In my first language, Bangla, home means a secure place living with family. But “What is family when blood ties strain across geographical and cultural distance? What family/home will stand on decades of silence and centuries of erasure?” (9). As I read these questions in Vox Jo Hsu’s recently published monograph *Constellating Home: Trans and Queer Asian American Rhetorics*, the author’s identification with and defining of home intersects with my longing for making a home in a transnational diasporic space when psychically my home remains in Bangladesh. In this book, Hsu provides a critical overview of racialized and gendered diasporic experiences in the U.S. through examining the rhetorics of “Writing Rainbow,” a community-driven queer and trans people of color (QTPOC) writing activist project, and the three archives of trans and queer Asian American and Pacific Islander (QTAPI) peoples. Being positioned as “perpetual foreigners,” and displaced by the unsettling diasporic experiences as well as normative racialized narratives, QTPOC and migrant communities (re)create a shared archival space of home with their counternarratives which Hsu unfolds throughout the book (56). The author analyzes individual experiences of the QTAPI community to expose historical and political contexts that render diasporic identities as others, thereby, problematizing the normative notions of US citizenship, settler colonialism, global capitalism, and the politics of race, gender, and sexuality. By foregrounding counter-stories of historically marginalized communities, Hsu challenges settler colonial logics that racialize and oppress Asian Americans, non-binary, and people of color. In the process, the author also braids their community experiences and vulnerabilities, their sites of belonging/unbelonging, and their haunting/haunted memories in a shared space of commonalities (QTAPI) through community participatory research and dialogues.

*Constellating Home*, according to Hsu, is an act of storytelling or homing. Hsu approaches “home as a constellation of stories that determine with whom, where, and how we belong” (9). When I read the introduction, “Constellating Home: Storytelling, Diasporic Listening, and (Re)Defining Commonplaces,” I remembered cultural rhetorician Malea Powell’s words, “story is anything but easy” (384). Some stories take place to colonize us. To reclaim spaces that are destroyed by the “stock stories” about racial minorities, Hsu constellates the QTAPI community stories and their experiences. By tethering formative methodological conversations with intersectional and transnational feminist theories, queer theory, critical race theory, and disability studies, Hsu delineates a spectrum of complex stories embodying people’s experiences from historically marginalized communities. In their words, homing is a narration of personal experiences that fosters conjoining “social analysis, collective politics, and mobile sets of belonging” (4). Through homing, a narrator discovers “the sites of (un)

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belonging” (9). For example, in their “Ghost Passages: A Prologue,” Hsu shares their trauma and reminds us about the haunting nature of traumas. “Trauma time is cyclical,” according to Hsu (1). They gather information on these haunting memories related to “migration, estrangement, longing, love, and belonging” within this community through diasporic listening (12). At the same time, Hsu directs us toward understanding the possibilities of homing to create spaces built by “communal imagination” (11). Readers can take away Hsu’s homing practices and diasporic listening as portable methodological tools to explore diverse narratives globally dispersed in diasporic communities.

This book adds a new dimension to the field of rhetorics, disability studies, and gender and sexuality studies with its attention to the interconnectedness of majoritarian tropes and stock stories in controlling non-normative bodies deployed by the seemingly disconnected nation-state and sociocultural agendas. For example, Hsu engages diasporic listening to closely interpret the discourses of yellow peril and model minority that construct public perceptions of the Asian American identity of success. In this publicly circulated trope, Asian Americans, who do not fit the model minority heteronuclear family shoes with shiny success stories, are the suspected/unwanted others. The model minority trope relegates working class and non-binary Asian Americans as menaces to the nation. The stories of Asian Americans are framed through these hegemonic discourses of yellow peril or model minority; consequently, perpetuating the ostracization of non-conforming Asian Americans in the US. Drawing from QTAPI archival works, this book presents counternarratives to challenge the normative rhetorics that are employed to monolithically frame the Asian American culture (15). Hsu shares their own experiences as a trans, queer, and disabled Taiwanese American through their encounter with these archives and communities. Interventionist in their approach to majoritarian narratives that weaponize nonconforming and people of color identities/bodies to promote hegemonic discourses, Hsu constellates diasporic stories to conduct transformative liberatory work. This book therefore is not about a single story as it interconnects diverse counternarratives to explore queer possibilities for social justice. Subsequently, the chapters expose how normative rhetorics perpetuate racism and hetero/cissexism and ableism, as Hsu explores the body politics of regulating QTPOC and disabled bodies.

Hsu deconstructs the social and cultural norms associated with love in chapter one, “Love in Constellation: The Dragon Fruit Project and Differential Consciousness-Raising.” Situating their discussion on Chela Sandoval’s “differential consciousness” theory, Hsu maps out counter-stories of diverse identities who are often stigmatized, alienated, silenced, or criminalized because of their deviancy from the normative love plot. From chapters one to three, Hsu explores how QTAPI stories are entangled with intricate social and political histories both in the USA and other countries. While narratives are used as hegemonic tools for exclusionary practices, Hsu excavates the power of counternarratives by providing non-normative narratives of “love, resilience, and ancestry” (25). Hsu analyzes multiple narrators’ stories to reveal the enforcement of global capitalist, nationalistic, racial and gendered norms into their personal experiences under the guise of heterosexual familial love ideology. Hsu exposes the entanglement of “normative love scripts” with whiteness, heterosexuality, and ableism which were also evident in the history of eugenics. They further explain “racist love,” a term introduced by Frank Chin and Jeffrey Paul Chan, to demonstrate how minorities are still disciplined by white America (37). For example, the story of Kim Dang shows how the US nation-state considered her queerness not only as a betrayal of heteronormative ideology but also her homosexuality was interpreted as a lack of patriotism. In Dragon Fruit Project (DFP), Dang uses homing to redefine patriotism that is supportive of queer women of color. According to Hsu, “homing, in these accounts, situates the narrator’s lived experience in historical context to track the limitations and possibilities of love” (36). Building on Amy Sueyoshi’s question, “What is the relationship between love and activism?” Hsu shows how homing enables the DFP narrators to constellate radical narratives of love where their queer desires are harnessed as “the groundwork for future work” (39).

Chapter 2, “Resilience as/in Homing: The Visibility Project and Transformative Taxonomies,” investigates “resilience” as a topos to scrutinize how Asian Americans are racialized in the US. In response to the essayist

Wesley Yang's published piece in a literary magazine, "The Face of Seung-Hui Cho" and his book, entitled *The Souls of Yellow Folk*, Hsu points out how Yang presents the rhetorics of white heterosexual masculinity and individual heroic success as resilience without considering the systematic and structural supports that benefit white, cisgender, and able-bodied people (77). Through examining QTAPI's visibility project, this chapter expands on three components of this project — "visible resilience, archival resilience, and performing resilience" — to posit the archival power in resisting white hegemonic discourses of resilience (74). Visibility projects inform readers about the "intergenerational and interpersonal connection that have enabled QTAPI resilience" (105). In chapter 3, "Tendering Kin: Constellating Relations with the Queer Ancestors Project," Hsu builds on the discussions of colonialism and political manipulation that downplay the ancestral heritage/contribution of people of color and LGBTQ people. The archive reopens the possibilities for (re)historicizing/ reimagining QTAPI visibility through their archival project. By employing Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Hsu reimagines creating possibilities through these counter-narratives for liberating people.

In chapter 4, Hsu envisions bodies as archival repositories. Such lens of considering our bodies and embodied experiences as storehouses of memories and histories, much like archives, is groundbreaking for excavating the epistemology of marginalized communities. What I also appreciate is Hsu's homage to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Alison Kafer, among others as they demonstrate how personal stories deconstruct the majoritarian perception of cultures. A central focus in this chapter is exploring Hsu's own story as a queer child and carefully reinterpreting their personal narrative in connection to love, resilience, ancestry, and home to reveal their places of belonging and (un)belonging. In this chapter, they bring forward their conflicts with living between two cultures much like Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*. Hsu uses "theories in the flesh," a concept by Anzaldúa and Moraga that suggests "politic born out of necessity" in describing the resistance that's formed by the embodied experiences of minorities (156). As an example, Hsu provides a detailed overview of their struggle as a queer family member which their parents could not reconcile with from their cultural perspectives. Through several examples, Hsu points out how the queer body is punishable by the nation-state in the context of both Western and Eastern cultures. Hsu also indicates a gap in queer studies as Judith Butler and Michel Foucault's epistemological contribution to queerness is rooted in the westernized notions. They don't address the realities of other queer people, including Hsu. In the same chapter, they once again demonstrate how the rhetoric of "individual resilience" is used to perpetuate health-related injustices by sharing the author's embodied experiences as a chronically ill person (167).

Hsu's book is a guide to understanding the local and global nature of injustices perpetuated by US colonialism and imperialism that transnationally control marginalized bodies. Hsu shows us how personal stories can forge resistance against hegemonic discourses through constellation and in the form of creating communities. This book invites POC, LGBTQ+, and disabled folks to find a site of belonging. As I make a departure from this review, I want to share that the homing of Hsu's experiences and the QTAPI community resonated with me as a woman of color and as a first-generation international graduate student pursuing a Ph.D. in rhetoric and composition. I find a place of restoration in this book in an otherwise home of (un)belonging in white America.



## Works Cited

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