



The Racial Mundane: Asian American Performance and the Embodied Everyday

Ju Yon Kim

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Winner, Lois P. Rudnick Book Prize presented by the New England American Studies Association

Across the twentieth century, national controversies involving Asian Americans have drawn attention to such seemingly unremarkable activities as eating rice, greeting customers, and studying for exams. While public debates about Asian Americans have invoked quotidian practices to support inconsistent claims about racial difference, diverse aesthetic projects have tested these claims by experimenting with the relationships among habit, body, and identity.

In *The Racial Mundane*, Ju Yon Kim argues that the ambiguous relationship between behavioral tendencies and the body has sustained paradoxical characterizations of Asian Americans as ideal and impossible Americans. The body's uncertain attachment to its routine motions promises alternately to materialize racial distinctions and to dissolve them. Kim's study focuses on works of theater, fiction, and film that explore the interface between racialized bodies and everyday enactments to reveal new and latent affiliations. The various modes of performance developed in these works not only encourage audiences to see habitual behaviors differently, but also reveal the stakes of noticing such behaviors at all. Integrating studies of race, performance, and the everyday, *The Racial Mundane* invites readers to reflect on how and to what effect perfunctory behaviors become objects of public scrutiny.

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