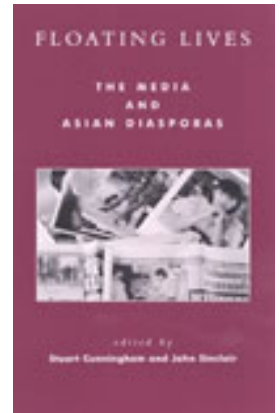




Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas



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Cunningham, Stuart and Sinclair, John (Eds.).
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As scholars have explored the dynamics of globalization in recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the way diasporic communities construct identity. In particular, diasporic Asian communities have been studied on a large scale in terms of their economic power, for example, or on a very personal level in the work of scholars like Ien Ang who use their own experiences as a frame for the discussion (1). The contributors to *Floating Lives: The Media and Asian Diasporas* take an intermediate approach by studying small groups of people within several Asian communities of Australia. They offer a valuable perspective on the functioning of diasporic communities and the way television and film are used in identity formation.

The book starts with a chapter by the editors, who lay out the terms and the scope of these projects, as well as contextualize the studies with an overview of Australian history and policy around immigration. The remaining chapters detail studies of Chinese, Vietnamese, Fiji Indian, and Thai communities in Australia, each taking the multi-layered approach outlined in Chapter One.

Unlike many existing studies of the ways film and television construct ethnic identity, these researchers have deliberately chosen to focus on how audiences use visual media for their own purposes to meet their own needs. Additionally, the authors question the extent to which cultures can be neatly divided along ethnic lines or power relations, arguing that immigrant and host communities intermingle and alter each other in a constantly shifting negotiation. This collection allows readers to see important connections between the personal circumstances of the subjects, and the larger Australian context, and also to notice the way different groups of immigrants, such as Chinese and Vietnamese, are connected by their media consumption.

The researchers provide thick description of their subjects with a combination of surveys, observations and interviews that capture both the specifics of class status, educational levels, motives for immigration, etc, and reveal how these factors change the manner in which television and film are used. For example, in the chapter titled "Bollywood Down Under," Manas Ray explores how the terms of migration, economic or exilic, are reflected in the attitudes toward media from the home culture as a way to maintain old national ties or to maintain culture while creating new national ties.

For all the detailed description and contextualization, the authors do fall somewhat short of their promise in two ways. First, although the focus is on television and film, some reference to the effects of the internet would be helpful—either to illustrate how these media interact, or to explain why they don't. This absence was surprising considering the extent to which online diasporic communities have garnered attention in recent years. For example, [Huaren.Org](#) has helped to create a global identity for Chinese around the world.

Second, while the first chapter gives a thorough introduction to the issues under discussion, the lack of a conclusion is disappointing; bringing all of these studies together would show that they are not only instructive in themselves, but in relation to each other.

However, the interest of the studies far outweighs these deficiencies. *Floating Lives* stands as a valuable resource for scholars investigating diasporic communities by offering concrete cases that examine how theories about diaspora may or may not play out in the real lives of migrants.

Studies of media and diaspora are often grouped by ethnicity, so that interested readers can find more information by visiting the websites of, for example, Chinese communication scholarly organizations like the [Association of Chinese Communication Studies](#). Conference websites can also be a good source of information, such as for the recent Media in Transition 2 conference held at MIT, which had a special focus on Globalization and Asia this year, and provides [links](#) to all the papers in pdf. format.

1. Ang recently published a book that explores the intersection of theory and personal experience, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West*. Some of her work can be seen online at [Mots Pluriels](#).

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