

## Book Reviews

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*Vamping the Stage: Female Voices of Asian Modernities*. Edited by Andrew N. Weintraub and Bart Barendregt. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017. vii+363 pp.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, entertainment venues, budding film industries, radio broadcasting, and recording technologies in Asia fostered varied mass-mediated popular musics, some of which combined both local and global influences into vibrant new hybrid genres. Some of the most compelling and innovative music came from female artists, some of whom, such as the divas of Shanghai nightclubs and films in the 1930s–1950s or Indian playback singers of the period after the Second World War like Lata Mangeshkar, retained a large fan base long after they had passed away or retired. In fact, the Mandarin recordings of the Shanghai songstresses are still available for sale in Hong Kong, Southeast Asia, and North America.

The scholarly literature on Asian pop musics and musicians grew steadily from the 1960s onwards. In recent years, a few general regional surveys and studies of various genres — such as Indonesian *dangdut*, Chinese rock, Hong Kong Cantopop, Japanese *enka* and Thai *luk thung* — have appeared, but only a few individual artists have received scholarly attention. This fine multidisciplinary volume of fifteen essays examining female stars from China, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia and Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, India, and Iran confirms how far we have come in terms of scholarly work on this topic. The essays are diverse in approach and coverage, but collectively they offer keen insights into the backgrounds, life stories, musical styles, appeal, personalities, audiences, and socio-

political importance of the artists, some of whom achieved fame outside their home countries, especially but not only in the ethnic diasporas scattered around the world.

As well-known experts on Southeast Asia, the editors provide an excellent introduction outlining the project's themes and how the essays fit together, inviting cross-talk between scholars from multiple fields whose contributions are grounded in place and context. They appropriately begin their essay with a brief sketch of Teresa Teng (Deng Lijun), the Taiwan-born songstress whose romantic, nostalgic songs beguiled millions of fans in Taiwan, China (where she had a huge underground following), Japan, Hong Kong, and in the large Chinese diaspora in Southeast Asia and North America. Her popularity endures years after her premature death in 1995. Considered the epitome of an international and modern pop star, her life and career reflect many of the themes in other essays.

Teng was a model of inter-Asian modernity whose voice crossed linguistic, national, and generational borders.... She was a persistent figure of the Asian diva, in life and in death ... Teng's voice and body, in common with so many Asian songstresses throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, symbolize the triumph and tragedy of gendered modernity. (p. 2)

Teng also reflected the emotional link between audience and artist. The authors argue that Teng and the other singers challenged representations of gendered norms in society and the entertainment industry but also reflected varied ideas of femininity and sex appeal. They became “vamps” — not just women who used sexual attraction but women who also created a stage for improvisation, creativity, and change. Artistic pioneers, they could be exploited by others for profit but were also active agents in shaping their own careers and performance.

The women profiled in the chapters are indeed diverse: the stars of early Chinese “talkies” including Anna May Wong and Butterfly Wu (Yiman Wang); one of the most iconic Shanghai divas, Zhou Xuan (Yifen Beus); Malay women singers/film stars in colonial Malaya

such as Nona Asiah (Tan Sooi Beng); films, “comfort women”, and the sex industry in Japanese-ruled colonial Korea (Joshua D. Pilzer); post-war Japanese *enka* chanteuse Misora Hibari (Christine Yano); 1960s–1970s Indonesian pop star Titiek Puspa (Andrew Weintraub); South Indian playback singer L.R. Eswari (Amanda Weidman); two contrasting performances by Lee Mi-ja and Patti Kim in 1960s South Korea (Kim Soojin); Superstar Siti Nurhaliza and Post-Islamist pop in Malaysia (Bart Barendregt); Iranian icon Googoosh (Farzaneh Hemmasi); two Filipina singers from the early and mid-twentieth century, Katy de la Cruz and Pilita Corrales (Ricardo Tremillos); Javanese *keroncong* songbird Waldjinah (Russell Skelchy); South Korean K-pop dance divas in the 1980s (Kim Hee-sun); and Hatsune Miku vocal synthesizer software and the Japanese sound of the future (Jennifer Milioto Matsue).

The essays suggest the ways in which these women reflected older traditions while, influenced by global musical trends, they also took popular musical cultures in new directions. Tan Sooi Beng notes that the

vernacular modernity that arose [in British Malaya] was not a total break with the conditions of the past but developed from the experiences of living in a rapidly changing world where social practices, orders, cultures, and ideas from different regions were constantly assessed, adapted, and transformed. (p. 83)

Some of these singers, including Misora Hibari and the prolific Zhou Xuan, were at least as famous for their films as their songs, and several, such as Googoosh and Titiek Puspa, became symbols of their nations or of the political leaders who patronized them.

In an edited collection reflecting a mix of styles, musical cultures, and time frames, the reader may find some essays more relevant to their own interests than others. For example, some essays are particularly strong on the entertainment industries that these artists had to operate within or struggle against. Some offer greater detail about life histories, sociocultural contexts, and the political dimensions of their subject’s work. This important book, focusing on remarkable and talented women, is a worthwhile read for scholars of Asian cultures

and modern history, specialists on world music and ethnomusicology, and informed fans of one or more of the performers profiled.

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*Caring for Strangers: Filipino Medical Workers in Asia.* By Megha Amrith. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2017. xiii+226 pp.

As healthcare becomes increasingly commodified and globalized, an opportunity structure has emerged for nurses from the Global South to engage in long-term mobility projects through labour migration to high-income countries/cities around the world. Yet migrant nurses are uncomfortably positioned at the interstices of low-status care work and high-skilled professional migrations. Megha Amrith explores the aspirations and experiences of Filipino migrant nurses working in the global city of Singapore as a way to understand the intimate relations that develop between migrant nurses and their patients, alongside the commercial and labour practices that bring these nurses to Singapore but keep them marginalized from mainstream society there. At the same time, Amrith situates Filipino migrant nurses within a broader history of labour migration from the Philippines, while situating Singapore as a stepping stone to more attractive destinations in North America and Western Europe. Amrith deftly draws from her extensive fieldwork in Singapore and the Philippines to maintain this productive tension and duality within each of the chapters of *Caring for Strangers*.

After the introductory chapter, which lays out the key themes of the book and provides a useful overview of the literature on care work and intimacy, and some brief histories of labour migration from the Philippines and to Singapore, the rest of the book is organized to track the trajectories that Amrith's migrant nurse interlocutors