The Changs Next Door to the Díazes: Remapping Race in Suburban California, by Wendy Cheng, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013. *xi*+285 pp., US\$25.00 (paperback), ISBN: 978-0-8166-7982-9

U.S.-based cultural geographers have a long history in investigating race and racialization in the production of landscape. This investigation has been conducted primarily under two themes: ethnic enclaves in immigrant gateway cities, and landscapes of anti-black racism and racial segregation. Wendy Cheng's book, *The Changs Next Door to the Díazes*, is an original and timely synthesis of these two themes in the context of suburban California. Cheng focuses on West San Gabriel Valley (SGV), a suburban region immediately east of downtown Los Angeles, where approximately 60% of residents are Asian Americans and 30+% are Latin@s and, as a result, has produced particular place-based identities such as "Asian *paisa*" and "SGV dreamgirl." Drawing from Michael Omi and Howard Winant's influential concept of racial formation, Cheng argues that West SGV produces its own regional racial formation, "in which locally accepted racial orders and hierarchies complicate and sometimes challenge hegemonic ideologies and facile notions of race" (p. 10). In a place like West SGV, then, Asian-Latin@ political alliances and interracial intimacies are possible, even as Asian Americans and Latin@s continue to be differentially racialized within the national racial formation, "perpetually triangulated vis-à-vis Black and white *and* present at all levels of a complex triracial social order" (p. 14). They also have differential relationships to whiteness and property, as evidenced by the Asian model minority stereotype and Latin@s' ambiguous whiteness. As Cheng demonstrates, West SGV residents rework and challenge those racializations, while at other times draw on them specifically during racial conflicts: a process Cheng calls racialized privilege and strategic uses of whiteness (p. 16).

There are five chapters, and each covers a particular arena in which West SGV's regional racial formation is produced and mobilized. Chapter 1 introduces the historical geography of race in West SGV as one of the first multiracial suburbs in Southern California. In an effort to break first the formal, then the informal, racially restrictive covenants in the real estate market, ethnic firms like Kashu Realty helped non-white families secure homeownership in West SGV. Because it was difficult for both Asian Americans and Latin@s to buy into white suburbs, their residential proximity in West SGV produced fluid racial and ethnic boundaries. This was particularly evident among the youth, who found that the non-white landscapes of West SGV was particularly conducive to the kind of playful performance and passing of racial and cultural identities. Chapter 4 employs a similar historical-geographic method to make sense of contemporary struggles over racialized civic landscapes in West SGV. In three different municipal debates, Cheng shows the workings of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls the performance effect, "in which an audience member or interlocutor attributes motivations and interests based on an identity (e.g., racial) ascribed to the speaker by the audience member or interlocutor himself" (p. 157). Repeatedly, non-white local politicians' motivations were publicly questioned in racial terms in debates over civic branding.

However, it is in the other chapters where Cheng produces the most original insights. In a natural extension of Chapter 1, Chapters 2 and 3 focus on spaces of education – a local high school and the Boy Scout troop, respectively. Through exploring the aftermaths of a controversial column in a high school newspaper, in which a first generation Chinese American student chastised Latin@ students for underperforming academically, Cheng teases out the production of schools as racialized landscapes. This production was accomplished through formal mechanisms (such as fast-tracking Asian American students into advanced courses) and

everyday gestures (where Latin@ students were seen as out of place in the same courses and non-athletic extracurricular activities). Here, Cheng argues – without attributing individual responsibility – that Asian American students are afforded a *racialized* privilege that relies on the production, circulation, and reproduction of the model minority discourse. In contrast to racial privileges like whiteness, where racism is seen as absent or irrelevant, racialized privilege “foregrounds the centrality of racialized meanings and outcomes... which can lead to a conditional freedom of not having to think too deeply about one’s racial background, and a limited privilege to be considered exceptional. One’s race is not irrelevant but integral” (p. 75).

Chapter 3 puts similar issues into even starker relief, where the reporting of Shawn Smith as the first Black Eagle Scout from West SGV elicited negative reactions from troop leaders (many of whom are Asian Americans); both Shawn and the media who reported on his achievement were accused of “playing the race card” (p. 119). Through interviews, Cheng is able to expose just how provisional racialized privilege can be. Even though in West SGV it may provide Asian American (and to a certain extent in this case, Latino) boy scouts some privilege within the supposedly color-blind American Dream, “they could not help but speak about Shawn” – and unintentionally themselves – “in racialized ways” that conform to the national racial formation (p. 121).

Cultural geographers will identify deeply with Chapter 5, where Cheng explores interracial intimacies in West SGV. Cheng argues that because of West SGV’s demographics, “multiethnic and multiracial *affiliations*, if not identities, are experienced by a much broader range of people than only those who identify as ‘mixed race’” (p. 174). Interracial intimacies (expressed as friendships, kinships, and romantic relationships) become an “epistemology born of place” where racial identities are fluid, multiethnic, and – most importantly – non-white-

majority from the get-go (*ibid.*). Two particular examples stand out. In the first one, Maya Garcia, who grew up in an English-speaking, Mexican American household, decided to major in ethnic studies in college due to her good friend, who is a Nisei Japanese American. Referring to Asian American history, Maya said, “These were my friends, *this was my experience*” (p. 178, emphasis added). In the other example, Walter Ruiz, a Mexican American, has three children that “ran the gamut of the West SGV’s readily available racial identities”: a daughter who is a “typical American kid,” an older son who is deeply immersed in Chinese culture (“All his friends are Chinese.... His girlfriends have been Chinese.”), and a younger son who is “Captain Mexico” (p. 180-81). Both examples demonstrate the kind of affiliations that become possible with the particular “personality” of West SGV (p. 207).

Cheng’s analytical focus on the regional racial formation has produced a rich and textured cultural geography of West SGV. But as she gestures in the conclusion, it is not just about West SGV since localized knowledges – and people – travel. Cheng’s framework of racial formation allows for scalar jumps between the regional and national racial formations, and this book definitely charts the need for cultural geographers to trace the mobility of these racializations in the opposite direction; instead of the typical national racial formation, what if we begin with a regional racial formation like West SGV’s? This book also demonstrates the need for cultural geographers to pay more attention to spaces of social reproduction like schools. Chapter 2, in particular, is a fascinating interlocutor to Mary Thomas’ equally excellent book *Multicultural Girlhood* (2011), which examines racial-ethnic segregation and responses to racial violence among Armenian and Latina girls at a Los Angeles high school. In light of Lily Kong’s (2013) *JCG* address, which also calls for an engagement of identity in schools, it is exciting to

see *The Changs Next Door to the Díazes* contributing to, and charting new research directions in, the cultural geography of race and racialization.

Reference

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