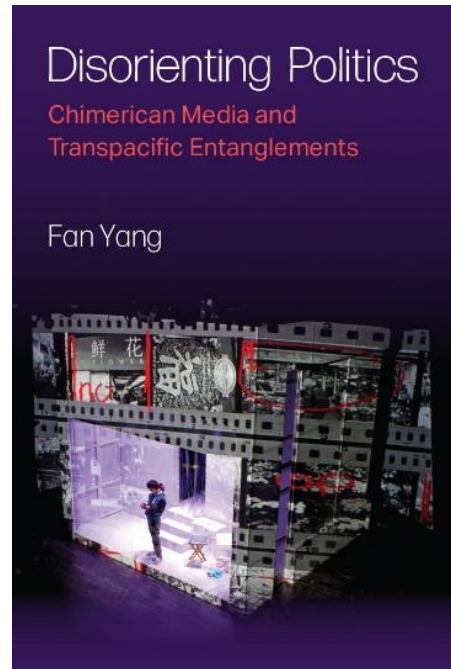


Fan Yang, **Disorienting Politics: Chimerican Media and Transpacific Entanglements**, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2024, 230 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

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Fan Yang's ***Disorienting Politics: Chimerican Media and Transpacific Entanglements*** examines how media narratives and cultural representations contribute to the racialization of China within U.S. political and cultural discourse. Yang aims to map the rhetorical and ideological patterns through which China is constructed as an "Other" in American media life, particularly in the context of the early twenty-first century and the discourse surrounding China's rise. To this end, the book examines how media forms, images, and narratives constitute the hybrid political space between the two nations. Yang argues that even when the China–U.S. relationship seemed to decouple, the two countries remained deeply interwoven through a symbiosis of imagination, political discourse, and material realities. This hybrid formation, what she calls Chimerican media, functions like a "chimera," a composite being that reflects the complex, uneven entanglement of both countries (p. 5).



The book's interdisciplinary approach and its use of diverse media examples, ranging from film and television series to digital platforms, allow Fan Yang to pursue this argument across a wide range of empirical domains. Drawing on feminist theory, critical race studies, and communication studies, Yang moves beyond traditional media representation frameworks to emphasize racialization as the operative logic structuring American media's construction of China. This situates the book at the intersection of transnational media studies and critical race theory.

One of the book's contributions is theorizing the media that manifest Chimerica as "transpacific media" (p. 7). Unlike conventional "transnational media," transpacific media is "ageopolitical," emerging from the Pacific Ocean as a contact zone for circulating American and Asian culture, people, capital, and ideas (pp. 7–8). Its fluid nature connects to the concept of "Disorienting" (p. 18), challenging territorial and static ideas of nation and state, and contributing to conversations between new materialism and cultural studies by considering non-human agents as active participants.

This concept also forms a second key contribution. Fan Yang applies the "disorienting" lens to show how U.S. media portray China as "antihuman," "subhuman," or "superhuman," especially during COVID-19, which Belinda Kong (2019) calls "bio-orientalism" (pp. 8–9). The term is an intentional play on the word "Orient" by "dis-orienting." By using this term, she seeks to unlace the East–West binary that has long

defined the West against an Asian Other. Drawing on Sara Ahmed and Frantz Fanon, Yang argues that disorientation operates on two levels. First, this othering disorients people of color by marking them as out of place, as seen in anti-Asian violence during COVID-19. At the same time, it serves as a method she uses to shake loose the assumption that politics must be rooted in fixed places and identities and to imagine instead a relational politics built on the entangled connections between China and the United States. In doing so, Yang also builds on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (p. 11), critiquing static binaries and emphasizing dynamic interconnections.

In chapter 2, Fan Yang examines media artifacts like popular films such as *The Martian*, which use narratives about U.S. national debt owed to China. Using "fiscal Orientalism," she shows how these narratives racialize China while hiding its economic subordination within the U.S.-led dollar system (p. 52). Yang argues that fiscal orientalism merges the "time of the Other" with the "time of debt" (p. 58). This positions China as a threatening future creditor. By placing China in a menacing future while America is framed as a declining debtor, these narratives pressure citizens to oppose government social spending. Yang demonstrates this through the "Chinese Professor" advertisement, which inaccurately implies that China holds most of the U.S. debt and is used to resist domestic social programs, such as healthcare. This Othering, in turn, provides an ideological fix for the United States during a state crisis and limits alternative ways of imagining the national community.

Chapter 3 connects to racialization through culture, where the author examines Cultural Chimerica using examples such as *Firefly* and Confucius Institutes. *Firefly*, set in 2517, depicts an "Anglo-Sino Alliance" dominating the galaxy, and non-native characters speak a mix of Chinese dialects (p. 24). This connection illustrates a cultural blend of America and China. China's influence is implied through language and cultural integration. This whole narrative links to the Confucius Institutes, which U.S. media and politicians often frame as a "cultural invasion" (p. 23), while white elites such as Mark Zuckerberg learn Mandarin to prepare for China's future rise. This shows neoliberal individualism and a soft power struggle between the U.S. and China, highlighting new forms of cultural entanglement, racialization, and struggles for global influence.

In chapter 4, the author examines political Chimerica through Netflix's TV series *House of Cards* (2013–2018), focusing on how China is depicted in the show and how Chinese audiences receive it. The chapter highlights how Netflix, as a global, data-driven platform, shapes production, distribution, and reception, linking U.S. and Chinese political imaginaries. It argues that the media is not merely a vehicle for representing politics but an environment in which political realities are enacted. This connects to the earlier illustration of the co-constitution of China and the U.S. in a transpacific media space.

The book concludes by bringing together interconnected threads. On one hand, Yang explores ecological entanglement, linking George Floyd's "I can't breathe" to Chinese workers' struggles and the Chinese people's call to "breathe together," emphasizing air's political, economic, and environmental importance (p. 49). Transpacific pollution, often labeled "Chinese air," is shown to be a product of both nations' industries and consumption (p. 126). Viewing the pandemic as a "dress rehearsal" for a greater ecological crisis, Yang introduces the "green state" concept, where environmental policy transcends borders (p. 134). On the other hand, these ecological concerns cannot be separated from the concept of racial capitalism. Therefore, she uses this concept to explain how economic systems exploit racial differences to

extract labor and create wealth. Examples like shifting 800 customer service calls from Euro-America to India or outsourcing Filipino workers for content moderation illustrate historically colonized regions becoming part of a new regime of “data colonization” and digital slavery (p. 128). This link is further explained by Apple products “designed in California and assembled in China” (p. 138). This serves as a reminder that although China is criticized in American media as an air polluter, both nations are deeply complicit in the same system. Together, these threads reinforce Yang’s central argument that China and the United States are too entangled, ecologically, economically, and racially, to be understood as simple opposites.

While Fan Yang examines the imaginary and material processes shaping Chimerican entanglements, the book opens several doors for future inquiry. How audiences detect “absent presences” in media texts and which agents participate in Chimerican space remain valuable questions that Yang’s framework could helpfully guide. Similarly, the question of whether China also acts as a subject in co-producing its own narrative, rather than being solely objectified in the American media, is worth exploring for further research. Lastly, a comparison with how Americans are represented in Chinese media, particularly within China’s authoritarian media context, could also extend the book’s conceptual framework in productive ways.

Disorienting Politics will be particularly valuable for scholars and graduate students working at the intersections of media studies, cultural studies, critical race theory, and transnational communication. Those interested in postcolonial theory, Asian American studies, and political economy will find its conceptual framework especially insightful. Beyond academia, policy analysts and journalists seeking to understand how media both represent and shape U.S.-China geopolitical tensions will also find it a practical resource.

Reference

Kong, B. (2019). Pandemic as method. *Prism*, 16(2), 368–389. <https://doi.org/10.1215/25783491-7978531>