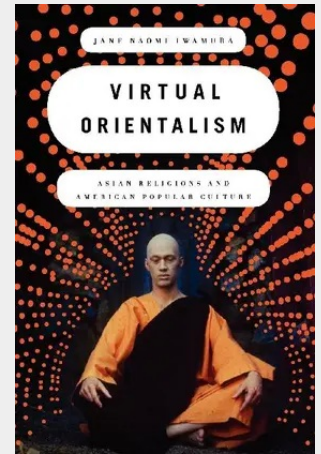


Virtual Orientalism

Asian Religions and American Popular Culture

Saffron-robed monks and long-haired gurus have become familiar characters on the American pop culture scene. Jane Iwamura examines the contemporary fascination with Eastern spirituality and provides a cultural history of the representation of Asian religions in American mass media. Initial engagements with Asian spiritual heritages were mediated by monks, gurus, bhikkhus, sages, sifus, healers, and masters from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and religious traditions. Virtual Orientalism shows the evolution of these interactions, from direct engagements with specific individuals, to mediated relations with a conventionalized icon. Visually and psychically compelling, the Oriental Monk becomes for Americans a "figure of translation" - a convenient symbol for alternative spiritualities and modes of being. Through the figure of the non-sexual, solitary Monk, who generously and purposefully shares his wisdom with the West, Asian religiosity is made manageable - psychologically, socially, and politically - for American popular culture.

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