



# “An Australian beauty-lover based in Singapore”: negotiating Asian Australian identity in the beauty vlogosphere

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## Abstract

This article explores how the conventions and culture of beauty vlogging elucidate Asian Australian identity and politics. Drawing on a qualitative analysis of Asian Australian beauty vlogger Tina Yong’s vlogs, I explore how national, ethnic, and racial identities are negotiated through platform logics, commercial imperatives, and community participation. Yong’s vlogs offer tangible ways to narrate the mundane, everyday experiences of Asian Australian identity that are underrepresented in mainstream Australian media. At the same time, Yong’s self-representation is made legible through her engagements with the commercialized beauty vlogosphere and her transnational audience, which tend to reduce the potential for illuminating hybrid and culturally specific Asian Australian experiences, communities, and politics. While Yong’s vlogs generate productive dialogue on race/ethnicity and race-based affinity communities, platform and commercial logics hinder her representational capacity as an Asian Australian subject who is doubly marginalized within the global beauty vlogosphere.

**Keywords:** beauty vlogs, Asian Australian, race, identity, YouTube.

In a vlog titled “Smokey Eye Makeup for Hooded or Asian Eyes” (Yong, 2015), Vietnamese Australian beauty vlogger Tina Yong presents a relatively conventional makeup tutorial with a makeover narrative featuring “before” and “after” looks, expert advice such as using matte shades to create depth and hacking angles to locate the eye socket, and detailed attention to the specific consumer products used to create her look. However, her tailored advice to an imagined audience of Asian women, interpellated through the vlog title, her assertion that “you guys have requested it, it’s been all over my comments!” and the use of Korean subtitles in this English-language video, foregrounds the possibilities for a global, race-based affinity community in the beauty vlogosphere. Indeed, supporters leave numerous comments on Yong’s English-language, Asian-focused vlogs such as: “Finally! A real tutorial on a real monolid! Nice! Please do more!” and “omg I’m so glad you did a monolid makeup tutorial! I have eyes exactly like Sheryl [the video model] and it is really hard to find beauty videos where people have the same eyes as me,” revealing their joy at moving from marginality to visibility through the participatory cultures of YouTube.

I draw on Yong’s beauty vlogs, with their combination of intimate yet commercialized identity performances that are co-constructed by audiences and platform affordances, to explore the possibilities and limitations of digital representation for Asian Australians. Social media, and their emergent possibilities for self-representation, community formation, and networked counterpublics, offer the potential to generate discourse around Asian Australian identity, community, and politics. Beauty vlogs center Asian Australian identity with their audiovisual logics that foreground both Yong’s racial background and her broad Australian accent. However, the possibilities for self-representation in YouTube’s participatory culture must also

be negotiated through the commercial motivations and global orientation of both the beauty vlogosphere and the YouTube platform.

I explore Yong’s self-titled YouTube channel, which boasts 3.67 million subscribers as of November 2023, as an example of hypervisible Asian Australian digital representation. While Yong’s vlogs are ostensibly focused on makeup and beauty, they provide a space for exploring and deconstructing the essentialist logics of race, ethnicity, and nationality, particularly through intimate disclosures and creative identity play that allow her to give voice to everyday experiences of cultural identity. These representations are particularly valuable in the context of Australian mainstream media’s underrepresentation of Asian Australians. At the same time, Yong’s self-representation is made legible through her engagements with the commercialized beauty vlogosphere and her transnational audience. These influences tend to reduce the potential for illuminating hybrid and culturally specific Asian Australian experiences, communities, and politics as Yong’s identity is variously read as Asian, Asian diasporic or Australian depending on market segments and the location of the audience. While Yong’s vlogs generate productive dialogue on race/ethnicity and race-based affinity communities, platform and commercial logics hinder her representational capacity as an Asian Australian subject who is doubly marginalized within the global beauty vlogosphere.

## Asian Australians, multiculturalism and representation

In 2021, 17.4% of Australia’s population self-identified as having Asian ancestry (ABS, 2022), a census descriptor that conflates a wide diversity of ethnic, cultural, family,

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socioeconomic, and migration backgrounds but indicates the possibility for strategic essentialism (Spivak, 1987) which utilizes specific signifiers of racialized identity to challenge and destabilize a hegemonic Australian culture that continues to privilege Anglo-European norms (Chan, 2000) and to discursively situate “Asians” as perpetually foreign and unassimilable (Jensen, 2008). It is this project of emphasizing Asian political solidarity in Australia, in contrast to emphasizing ethnically specific groups of Asian Australians, that gives rise to Asian Australian studies as a politicized and “critical analysis of the culture, history and politics of Australians of Asian descent” (Lo, 2006, p. 16) that focusses on the hybridity of the Asian Australian experience (Ang, 2001). Understanding identity formation as “an ambivalent and contingent process (Lo et al., 2000, p. 2), Asian Australian studies involves taking into account the historical, political, and demographic specificities that contour the Asian Australian cultural identity. These specificities include Australia’s history as a colonial settler state, which has shaped its relationship with First Nations peoples and more recent immigrant communities; the White Australia policy, which explicitly targeted and excluded Asian immigrants and was only revoked in 1973; populist politician Pauline Hanson’s mainstream ascent in the 1990s on an explicitly anti-Asian political platform; and, state policies and geopolitics that have shaped the numbers and demographics of the Asian Australian population, including the skilled migration, international student, and refugee programs.

In this analysis, I am particularly concerned with articulating these specificities in relation to Asian American discourse, which has contributed substantively to scholarship on the Asian diaspora, race theory, and identity politics. While acknowledging the productivity of such discourse to Asian Australian studies (Lo, 2006), I seek to understand how and when Asian Australian identity politics might diverge from these theoretical findings. This involves a particular consideration of multiculturalism—which Stratton and Ang (1994) identify as one of the main discursive differences in U.S. and Australian articulations of race and identity politics. Multiculturalism operates in Australia at the level of official government policy and informs national identity, even though it is practiced in ways that reinforce fantasies of White nationalism (Hage, 1998) and elides possibilities for dealing substantively with racial difference, particularly in relation to First Nations people and Australians of Asian descent who are most starkly racialized in the Australian cultural context (Stratton & Ang, 1994). Australian state-sanctioned multiculturalism thus departs from the politicization of multiculturalism in the US, which has been largely “advanced by minority groups (...) who regard themselves as excluded from the American mainstream (Stratton & Ang, 1994, p. 126). These divergent national discourses of multiculturalism and race portend substantively different understandings of cultural identity and race-based identity politics (Stratton & Ang, 1994; Tomkins, 2020) that distinguish the cultural context of Asian Australian identity from its Asian American counterpart and underline the importance of scholarship that focuses specifically on the digital practices and self-presentations of Asian Australians.

While the Asian Australian population has steadily grown in the last few decades, they continue to be underrepresented in mainstream Australian media (Law, 2009; Song & Maree, 2021) and many Australians who come from non-English

speaking backgrounds “strongly believe that the Australian media do not represent their way of life” (Ang et al., 2002, p. 4). This has severely curtailed the mediated possibilities for exploring and politicizing the syncretism, fluidity, and situatedness of hybrid Asian Australian identities (Ang, 2001; Lo, 2006; Lo et al., 2000). In this context, social media and their participatory cultures offer new possibilities for Asian Australians to generate and circulate self-representations that are embedded within networked communities. For instance, a variety of Asian Australians have gained national and global visibility through social media platforms including musician and YouTuber Wengie; lifestyle and travel blogger Tara Milk Tea; TikTokker Jamie Zhu; fitness vlogger Chloe Ting; skit creator Junpei Zaki; and food blogger Nagi Maehashi. However, while social media platforms are “more racially plural, multicultural, and gender diverse by far than mainstream screen media” (Cunningham & Craig, 2019, p. 6), the possibilities for minority group representation on social media must be contextualized within the logics of the attention economy which tends to reinscribe a hierarchy of visibility based on existing social privileges (Boyd, 2011; Marwick, 2015). Additionally, the commercialization of digital lifestyle media compels the entrepreneurial subject to self-brand identity as commodifiable difference (Banet-Weiser, 2012) leading to a “cultural politics of diversity [that] seeks recognition and visibility as the end itself” (Gray, 2013, p. 772).

Recent studies have begun to explore Asian diasporic digital lifestyle content, and Asian influencers’ overrepresentation across digital lifestyle media (Dejmanee, 2023; Pham, 2015), however the majority of this research is centered around Asian American content creators (Tomkins, 2020) and is reliant on concepts formulated from U.S.-specific histories, demographics, and political contexts such as the model minority myth and postrace discourse (e.g., Guo & Lee, 2013; Kim, 2021; Lopez, 2014; Pham, 2015). Inversely, while Australian-based communication and culture scholars have developed prolific work on the Asian diaspora’s use of digital media in Australia (e.g., Cabalquinto, 2022; Martin, 2020; Sun & Yu, 2023), this research rarely references the political and theoretical framework of Asian Australian studies. To date, Tomkins (2020) offers one of the only examples of framing digital identity research in the context of Asian Australian studies through her book chapter on globally successful comedy vlogger Natalie Tran, the Vietnamese Australian creator of *community channel* on YouTube. Tomkins finds that Tran consciously deploys “Australian stereotypes in order to differentiate herself in the global YouTube community and, occasionally, to comically provide an internal critique of her own country” (p. 175) while simultaneously “negotiating and also often having to justify her Australian identity” (p. 176) due to her Asian heritage. This performance is politically significant for “normalising a (micro-)celebrity Asian identity into the popular Australian transnational imaginary” (p. 181) and for framing “Asian Australian femininity as fun, resistant, and ‘ordinary’ (...) in the face of the ongoing ‘Othering’ of Asian people in contemporary Australia” (p. 181). The current study builds on this analysis with a specific focus on beauty vlogging and how the norms and conventions of this digital culture potentially support and modify these findings on transnational Asian Australian microcelebrity.

## Performing identity through beauty vlogs

Beauty vlogs are a popular and lucrative YouTube genre, with beauty-related content generating more than 169 billion views in 2018 (Ceci, 2023) and “beauty” being one of the top search categories on YouTube (Banet-Weiser, 2017). The beauty vlogosphere is of particular significance to the Asian diaspora due to Vietnamese American Michelle Phan’s foundational role in popularizing the genre. Phan, a self-taught make-up artist, began uploading makeup tutorial videos in 2007 as a college student in Florida and by 2010 was the most subscribed female on YouTube with over a million subscribers. Ten years later, with over 8 million subscribers to her YouTube channel, Phan has built a lucrative media and cosmetics empire from her digital brand (Cunningham & Craig, 2017). Moreover, as a form, beauty vlogs are able to uniquely interpellate Asian Australian identity through their concurrent emphasis on the Asian facial features of the vlogger—with makeup tutorials framing the faces of beauty vloggers and often inspiring them to self-identify as Asian with tutorials that offer specific makeup advice for those with Asian features—and the use of extended voice-overs that can be used to distinguish Asian diasporic vloggers as Australian through their accents, in contrast to other genres such as blogging or Instagram influencing which generally do not focus on audio.

Eighty-six percent of the most viewed beauty content on YouTube is created by individual influencers rather than cosmetic brands (Nazerli, 2017), and beauty vloggers achieve success in the attention economy by embracing postfeminist regimes of visibility and willing self-surveillance (Dobson, 2008) and performing authenticity through practices such as uploading content filmed in their bedrooms and domestic spaces; self-deprecation and humor; incorporating friends and family into vlog content; and, filming themselves during mundane activities (Berryman & Kavka, 2017; Henderson & Taylor, 2020). These performed intimacies build rapport with followers who co-construct the meaning of these performances, most notably through digital traces such as comments, subscriptions, and views. It is these everyday digital intimacies, and the communities they generate, that can be significant in exploring the everyday politics of representation for Asian diasporic individuals (Dejmanee, 2023).

While the gender politics of beauty vlogs has been widely studied, I explore the beauty vlogosphere as a site where racial, ethnic, and national identities can be creatively challenged, reproduced, and interrogated. This follows work by Kim (2021) who argues that Asian American makeup vloggers transform limited and damaging stereotypes about Asian American femininity and beauty through their candor about body shaming experiences, often based on comparisons to Caucasian beauty norms; their provision of beauty advice which is specifically targeted towards Asian audiences; and the creation of visible and supportive communities of Asian and Asian American content creators and audiences. Alternatively, Tran (2020) points out that Asian American beauty vloggers inspire the development of Asian American communities through anti-fan forums used to critique Michelle Phan and other Asian beauty vloggers as pandering to internalized racism and drawing on commercial norms to transform their Asian features in line with hegemonically Caucasian beauty norms for women. These studies demonstrate the nuanced political discourses offered through the

Asian diaspora beauty vlogosphere, which will be applied here to the work of Asian Australian beauty vlogger Tina Yong.

## Methods

Tina Yong is a professional beauty vlogger and makeup artist, and an Australian of Vietnamese descent who started her self-titled beauty channel in 2014. Yong’s channel intersperses makeup tutorial vlogs with personal and lifestyle content including travel vlogs, vlogs about her pregnancy and mothering experiences, and food content, as well as a series of “Tina Tries It” videos in which she reviews obscure and unusual beauty practices. As of November 2023, Yong boasts 3.67 million subscribers to her YouTube channel, situating her among an elite group of influencers in a beauty vlogosphere built upon a hierarchy of visibility (for reference, in 2023 Jeffree Star was the most subscribed English-language beauty vloggers with nearly 16 million subscribers while Niki and Gabi, the tenth most subscribed beauty vlog, had 9.64 million subscribers [Statista, 2023b]), demonstrating a level of global impact and visibility rarely achieved by Asian Australian women.

I reviewed vlogs published to Yong’s YouTube channel between 2015 and early 2023 and selectively viewed beauty and lifestyle vlogs published during this period that referenced Asia (for instance, through country names, words such as K-beauty, specific Asian practices, references to Yong’s family) in their titles or descriptions, yielding a sample of 126 vlogs. From these 126 vlogs, I focused on a purposive sample of 20 vlogs where issues around Asian, Asian diasporic, or Asian Australian identity became salient. Associated comments from these 20 vlogs (ranging from  $n=515$  to  $n=5801$ ) were scraped using YouTube’s API onto Google Sheets for analysis. Informed by a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I performed a qualitative analysis of discourses emerging from the 20 vlogs including audio narrative, background information, title, and comments to inductively identify narratives and themes on the topics of race, ethnicity, nationality, and identity. In contextualizing these themes, I actively considered Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2001) approach to multimodal social semiotics, taking into account visuals, audiovisual content, medium and platform affordances to interpret meaning. I also supplemented this analysis by referencing Yong’s corresponding social media accounts as well as external media and vlog interviews.

In this analysis, I have considered the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (Franzke et al., 2020) particularly in regard to the use and reproduction of online content. As Yong is a professional vlogger with a large global following, I find it important to properly attribute her material where it is cited in this article, as the content forms part of a professionalized brand that constitutes her livelihood even if an academic audience is likely not the primary imagined audience for her work. However, where unparaphrased comments have been cited, I have anonymized the account names of the commenters.

## Giving voice to the Asian Australian experience

Ordinariness is central to building an authentic persona as a beauty vlogger. Henderson and Taylor have explored how

popular Australian beauty vloggers offer “life advice based on their personal experiences of being Australian young women; their authority is predicated on their ‘ordinariness’ (...) and its successful narration/performance” (2020, p. 125) and, for Asian Australians, this ordinariness can be interpreted as a political act in an Australian context where Asians are perennially Othered (Tomkins, 2020). Like the White Australian beauty vloggers described by Henderson and Taylor (2020), Yong performs ordinariness through sharing personal and everyday experiences as she vlogs about her relationship to her family, her first marriage and subsequent divorce, and travel experiences. However, in performing these commonplace digital disclosures, Yong organically illuminates facets of her experience and identity as a second-generation Asian Australian that have rarely been articulated in mainstream media.

Yong centers her Asian heritage in several makeup tutorials that she presents in Vietnamese with English subtitles. In a vlog titled “GRWM in Vietnamese! Hướng Dẫn Makeup Tiếng Việt” (Yong, 2018b), Yong prefaces her makeup tutorial by expressing self-deprecation and embarrassment about her lack of proficiency in spoken Vietnamese, in stark contrast to her self-presentation as a beauty expert who can confidently and knowledgeably advise viewers on which makeup brushes, shades, and techniques to use. During her presentation, she pauses multiple times to search for Vietnamese words and specialist terminology such as “concealer” and “beauty blender” using Google translate on her phone. Disclosing that she only uses Vietnamese to communicate with her parents, Yong demonstrates the inevitability of her connection to diasporic heritage despite her experience of this connection as partial and interrupted. Yong’s exaggerated disfluency—particularly within a genre in which skillful editing is deployed to produce seamless transformations—draws attention to the gaps and alienation of the hybrid Asian Australian experience, even as the tone of this vlog remains light-hearted and situated in the everyday routine of makeup application.

Cameo appearances by Huong—Yong’s mother—in Yong’s vlogs also provide an entry point into discussions of the Asian migration experience in Australia. In a vlog titled “Mature makeup: I give my mum a makeover!” (Yong, 2017). Yong gives voice to her mother’s story using the “background” section of the vlog:

[Huong] is 51yrs old and was born in Vietnam. She migrated to Australia 26 years ago and had me and my 2 brothers. During that time she worked in a factory and looked after us kids so she never got the chance to learn [English]—that’s why I speak to her in Vietnamese (...) She’s the best mum I could ever ask for. I love her to death!

Across her videos, Yong describes the mutual love and admiration within their relationship, noting that even though Huong cannot understand what Yong is saying in her English-language vlogs (which comprise the majority of her output) Huong proudly watches each one. Through sharing the intimacies of their relationship, Yong challenges racialized Western tropes of the Asian “tiger mom” and, additionally, Huong’s sporadic appearances serve as a synecdoche of second-generation Australian Yong’s relationship to the Vietnamese motherland as one that is tangible, sentimentalized and yet marked by material language barriers.

The intimacy of the beauty vlogosphere facilitates Yong’s representation of her Asian Australian identity as enfolded within everyday routines and structured through her personal relationships, and offers Yong a large degree of creative agency and self-determination in the presentation of these experiences. Even though Yong’s experience necessarily draws on details of her Vietnamese heritage, these discussions of parent-child relationships, parents’ migration histories, language disfluencies, and dating are relatable to the broader Asian Australian community. These every day and lived experiences of hybrid cultural identity have particular value in the context of Australian state multiculturalism, which occludes non-triumphant narratives and grounded experiences of multiculturalism and has long ignored such stories and experiences in mainstream media (Hage, 1998). These facts point to the representational value of Yong’s depiction of ordinary Asian Australian femininity on a platform with global reach.

### The commoditization of “Asian” and “Australian” as difference

While Yong engages in everyday politics through her intimate and everyday depictions of Asian Australian identity, I consider the ways that the political value of Yong’s visibility as an Asian Australian influencer are tempered by the commercial branding of identity as difference. Australian influencers have long referenced their “national specificity (indexed through things such as accent, vernacular, cultural touchstones, and style)” (Tomkins, 2020, p. 174), for instance through posting “shirtless beach photos in Australian branded swimwear (...) as an instantly recognizable brand of male Australian influencers” (Mavroudis, 2018, p. 86), as a point of distinction on global social media platforms. However, national branding is more complex for Asian Australians, whose racial identities visually position them outside the White national norm (Tomkins, 2020) and whose hybrid identities are often read by a transnational YouTube audience in ways that simplify or marginalize this cultural identity. Moreover, Yong’s transnational legibility is critical to her visibility as a digital influencer, and is structured by global commercial power dynamics which center the U.S. and certain East Asian markets in the beauty vlogosphere, with the U.S., China, and Japanese beauty markets generating the largest global revenue (Statista, 2023a) and the Korean Beauty (K-beauty) market rapidly growing in popularity, particularly with East Asian and Western consumers (Straits Research, 2021).

Although I attribute the identity label of Asian Australian to Yong in this article, I acknowledge Yong’s YouTube bio self-description as “an Australian beauty lover now living in Singapore” as a strategic and conscious agentic act. Her self-description as Australian, rather than Asian Australian, reflects the lack of currency of Asian Australian as an identity descriptor in Australia even though Yong frequently alludes to her Asian heritage in her vlogs. Similarly, I read Yong’s inclusion of her current location in Singapore—rather than her reference to her Vietnamese heritage or any other identity marker—as strategic in building her Asian audience base through her proximity to and knowledge of the Asian region.

Exploring Yong’s vlog archive reveals a fluid and dynamic approach to self-presentation. In vlogs posted prior to her relocation to Singapore in 2017, Yong references her national identity in vlog titles and content such as “Australian Girl

Tries Balut (Duck Embryo)” (Yong, 2016a) and “Australian Girl Tries American Candy & Snacks” (Yong, 2016b), suggesting the value of branding herself as Australian to a global audience. In 2015 and 2016, Yong also posts a slew of makeup tutorials catering specifically to monolid/hooded eyes—one of which attracted 4.6 million views in late 2023—suggesting the value of appealing to the Asian diaspora as a niche for her beauty vlog content. In contrast, vlogs posted after her move to Singapore reflect pan-Asian cosmopolitanism with vlogs that explore diverse Asian beauty products and trends such as “Japanese Igari makeup tutorial” (Yong, 2018a); “Trying New K-Beauty Products” (Yong, 2021a); and “I Tried an Ancient Chinese Facial Massage” (Yong, 2022). In reference to the burgeoning popularity of the K-beauty market, Yong’s vlogs also focus on specific Korean beauty trends, feature Korean celebrity makeup artists, and include Korean subtitles. These shifting self-branding practices suggest that Yong’s identity presentation is heavily reliant on her legibility to a transnational audience, and her ability to capitalize on her Asian identity in light of the increasing importance of Asian markets to the global luxury fashion and beauty industries (Pham, 2015).

This commodification of identity works to deny the hybridity and specificity of Yong’s Asian Australian identity performances, and Yong is instead interpellated as either Asian *or* Australian depending on the audience and context. For example, in Australian media roundups of vloggers and influencers Yong is presented as an unqualified Australian through descriptions such as “one of Australia’s biggest YouTube stars” (Yong, n.d.: The Road), or there is a tendency to focus on gender through portrayals of Yong as a “Woman to Watch” and interview questions such as “How can we be strong females?” (Beauty YouTuber Tina Yong, 2018) while eliding her race/ethnicity as a point of discussion. It is worth noting that this practice of reverting to Australian identity reflects a lack of circulation of “Asian Australian” as an identity marker, and is also mirrored in Yong’s self-presentation as simply “an Australian beauty lover” in her YouTube bio. However, as Dean Chan points out, such adoption of Asian Australians as unqualified Australians both suggests a “pre-given and hidden hegemonic privileging” (2000, p. 147) to the category of “Australian” that both reinforces its White normativity and only confers this title upon exceptional non-White Australians. In contrast, an extended feature on Yong in the *South China Morning Post* goes to great lengths to emphasize Yong’s Asian identity and deemphasize her Australian nationality, variously describing her as “Singapore-based”; “one of Asia’s most popular beauty Youtubers”; and “Vietnamese but grew up in Australia” (Kang, 2020), presumably in an attempt to broaden her appeal to Asian audiences. These descriptions of a seemingly assumed straightforward connection between Yong’s race and her relationship to the Asian region deny the complexity of Asian Australian hybridity as well as the specificity of her Vietnamese Australian experience.

The self-branding strategies that influencers are compelled to employ bestow visibility and assign value to difference according to pre-existing—commercializable—social hierarchies and global-capitalist power dynamics. For Yong, who is doubly marginalized as an Australian of Asian descent and as Australian in the global vlogosphere, commercial branding practices compel her strategy of variously emphasizing different elements of her identity in response to shifting market

dynamics and trends. In turn, these branding practices create limits to conceptualizing and performing Asian Australian identity as hybrid, dynamic, and contextual.

### Elusive Asian Australian dialogue in the transnational community

In addition to the self-branding practices of the beauty vlogosphere, the transnational audience has the tendency to mute specifically Asian Australian community, discourse, and politics through essentializing or universalizing Yong’s identity performances. For instance, one essentializing comment posted to Yong’s vlog: “Is it just me or [do] Australian girls all speak so gently and gracefully?” generates 52 replies. Additionally, many commenters respond to Huong’s appearances simply by reflecting wistfully and appreciatively on mother–daughter relationships, without affording any significance to the accompanying migration story. A similar universalizing tendency is seen as Yong’s Vietnamese language vlogs inspire a self-described global “Viet Army” to share their own complicated diasporic experiences and relationships to Vietnam and, more broadly, a coalition of immigrants including Mexican-Americans and non-Vietnamese Asian Americans to comment on how Yong’s story resonates with them. While there is value to these coalitions and their productive dialogue on race, ethnicity and identity, there is a continuing struggle to center specifically Asian Australian racial dialogue within the beauty vlogosphere.

In 2020, the “foxy eye” beauty trend circulated in the vlogosphere, driven by mostly White celebrities and models who used makeup to exaggerate a “slanted” appearance to their eyes. While the trend led many in the Asian American community to create TikTok videos decrying this trend as inappropriate and hurtful (Zhao & Abidin, 2023), Yong participates unironically and uncritically in this trend, offering an extensive tutorial on how to use makeup to exaggerate the look of “lifted” eyes, rather than capitalizing on her position as a prominent Asian beauty influencer to draw attention to the racist undercurrents to this trend. At times, Yong herself reproduces binary and essentialist racial discourses in her vlogs. While individual beauty vloggers of color should not solely bear the burdens of responding to racist discourse within the beauty industry, particularly when their livelihoods are dependent on these same industries, this demonstrates that despite Yong’s spectacular visibility in the global vlogosphere, there are clear limitations to her ability to use her platform to enact political agency and advocacy. In light of these constraints, the interactivity of YouTube’s platform and the global community hailed by Yong work to produce nuanced political discourse around racial and ethnic identities, particularly through digital traces such as comments that dynamically and visibly alter the dominant discourses of any given vlog.

In a vlog titled “Korean Makeup Do’s and Don’ts” (Yong, 2020), it becomes apparent that Yong’s representation is reliant on a logic of essentialism that relies on the assumed stability of national boundaries and the fixity of the monocultures they contain. Yong presents a prescriptive tutorial outlining what is and is not constitutive of Korean beauty and make-up routines, emphasizing this rigid instruction through a split screen close-up of her face which juxtaposes “correct” and “incorrect” applications of Korean makeup, with details including the precise placement of blush on the

cheekbones and number of face cleanses. However, Yong's transnational audience gently challenge such prescriptions, complicating the static and nationally essentialist portrayal of Korean beauty trends in this video. Audience members draw attention to the inherent dynamism of Korean beauty trends with comments such as: "I feel like it's old vs modern Korean makeup trends;" and "Perhaps, because makeup trends change moderately quickly, you could add the year in the title? That way (...) it could be a series every year showing how Korean makeup trends have changed." Furthermore, commenters challenge the assumed rigidity of this nationalism, for instance through the joking comment, "When you go to Korea and your Korean friends do all the don'ts." This dialogue emphasizes the fluidity and malleability of national and ethnic identities within the Asian region and demonstrates how Yong's transnational audience foreground the polysemy of her beauty vlogs through contextualizing her commentary within their own fluid, transnational and diasporic experiences.

The value of this transnational dialogue becomes even more apparent in moments where Yong's vlogs reinforce a problematic binary between Asia/West. This occurs when Yong suggests that compared to Western products, Asian beauty and fashion products are cheap, weird, and of inferior quality. For instance, in a video titled "I Tried Kylie Swim So You Don't Have To (...)" (Yong, 2021b) where Yong gives a detailed demonstration of the poor quality of Kylie Jenner's swimwear range, she describes the swimsuits as "designed in America but made in China" and "the first samples they got back from China," casually perpetuating the notion that Chinese production is cheap. In response, a commenter who describes herself as a fashion merchandiser writes: "don't look down on products just because they're made in China. This country can actually get whatever quality of product you need. If you need cheap product they'll do that and if you need high quality product they'll do exactly that. They're very efficient and good with meeting client requirements." This example demonstrates how the transnational audience challenges Asian/Western dichotomies and stereotypes, including when such perspectives are presented by Asian diasporic vloggers themselves.

The affinity communities that gather around Yong's Asian Australian identity performance tend to have an awareness of racial and ethnic identity politics that contribute nuance and perspective to Yong's representation and racial/ethnic discourses. Commenters expand discussions about diaspora and make visible broad and at times surprising affinity groups and, given the fan cultures generally accorded to microcelebrities such as beauty vloggers, these discussions are often expressed in thoughtful and civil ways. However, the comments section on YouTube has structural limitations as a site of political activism: comments can be unilaterally moderated and erased by account owners; comments cannot easily be searched for or indexed; and comments are not designed to support open and continuing dialogue between audience members. More importantly for the present study, the comments section is primarily contributed to by a transnational audience, which furthers the dilution of Asian Australian specificity as non-Asian Australian commenters tend to universalize the Asian or Australian elements of Yong's identity performance, or actively essentialize or fetishize her identity.

## Conclusion

Hypervisible Asian Australian influencer Tina Yong draws on the conventions of the beauty vlogosphere to articulate intimate and mundane elements of her Asian Australian identity and experience to a broad public, demonstrating the material and everyday experiences of negotiating racial, ethnic, and national identities. This content has representational value given the continuing lack of Asian Australian representation in mainstream Australian media. However, the beauty vlogosphere also presents its own limitations to Asian Australian representational politics. While the beauty vlogosphere encourages intimate disclosures, the aspirational tone of the vlogosphere also means that content that might express anger at racism or the pain of alienation that would challenge the notion of everyday multiculturalism is generally absent. This point is reinforced by the fact that the performance of Asian Australian identity in this consumer-oriented genre is also somewhat inextricable from neoliberal practices that present ethnicity and race as commoditizable differences that can be strategically presented as a niche brand by enterprising subjects. Finally, the visibility of Yong's performance takes place on a foundation of hegemonic, assumed binary gender, hegemonic femininity, and postfeminist politics that flourishes within the beauty vlogosphere.

Most saliently in this analysis, the tension between the local specificity from which Yong's hybrid cultural identity emerges and the global audience which accords Yong visibility on the platform means that Asian Australian communities and dialogue are rarely centered or made visible through Yong's work. In the transnational context, Yong's performance of her hybrid Asian Australian identity is often muted by U.S.- and Asian-based audiences who interpellated her identity practices as either Australian or Asian diasporic. This impulse is also reinforced by the commercial imperatives of Yong's brand which commoditize "Asian" and "Australian" as distinguishing characteristics that are separate, and separately valuable, for different market segments. Alternatively, the visibility of the transnational audience works to highlight new globally networked affinities and to generate rich discussions on the negotiated, everyday construction of racial, ethnic, and national identities. This dialogue helps further the broad goals of Asian Australian politics, including destabilizing the binary boundaries between Asian and Australian, and Asian and the West.

This case study offers an example of the ways that digital identity representations are negotiated within the constraints of platform logics, the commercialization of visibility, and the digital traces of transnational followers and commenters. This particular focus on Asian Australian beauty vlogging highlights the centrality of the transnational community in making meaning in ways that reveal the struggle for doubly marginalized subjects to fully benefit social media's participatory cultures and to articulate the hybridity of a specifically Asian Australian identity and experience.

## Data availability

The data underlying this article are available on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com>. These data were derived from the following resources from Tina Yong's YouTube channel, which is available in the public domain:

	Title	Link
1	I Tried An Ancient Chinese Facial Massage *Better than Gua Sha*	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5h8Cp3OHrA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O5h8Cp3OHrA</a>
2	Trying New K-Beauty Products 2021	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GK9o0PYempE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GK9o0PYempE</a>
3	Weird K-Beauty Products the Internet Made Me Buy	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMsVA3gr1JE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMsVA3gr1JE</a>
4	BADDIE MAKEUP - Turning Myself into an ABG (Asian Baby Girl)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtUo_Hwt0x0">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtUo_Hwt0x0</a>
5	Korean Makeup Do's and Don'ts   TINA YONG	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVMWLDiWN08&amp;t=9s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVMWLDiWN08&amp;t=9s</a>
6	Full Face of New Korean Beauty Products   TINA TRIES IT	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Whn2xTIHfM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Whn2xTIHfM</a>
7	I Get a Bridal Makeover by Korean Celebrity Makeup Artists	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=035pAJ180kw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=035pAJ180kw</a>
8	Lunar New Year Makeup Tutorial—Trang điểm đón Tết	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lu57qXJaD_E">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lu57qXJaD_E</a>
9	GRWM in Vietnamese! Hướng Dẫn Makeup Tiếng Việt   TINA YONG	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz4BYUFTpJ4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz4BYUFTpJ4</a>
10	Makeup for Monolid Eyes—Tina Yong	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubd345jy-US">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ubd345jy-US</a>
11	apanese Igari Inspired Makeup AKA “Hangover” Makeup Look- Tina Yong	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiWANGBg2FG">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiWANGBg2FG</a>
12	I Moved to Singapore + Empty Apartment Tour! Tina Yong	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sjbdkz7HLIU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sjbdkz7HLIU</a>
13	Mature Makeup   I Give My Mum a Makeover! Tina Yong	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18Z4Njl0gL8&amp;t=1s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18Z4Njl0gL8&amp;t=1s</a>
14	Australian Girl Tries American Candy & Snacks   TINA TRIES IT	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgrXSsWklfuE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XgrXSsWklfuE</a>
15	SPEAKING VIETNAMESE, BREAKUPS #ASKTINA-NYTHING	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6a7_GronvA&amp;t=23s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L6a7_GronvA&amp;t=23s</a>
16	Brown Smokey Eye Makeup for Small/Hooded/Monolid Eyes   Tina Yong	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSWJvoD6Te4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSWJvoD6Te4</a>
17	Smokey Eye Makeup for Small/Hooded/Monolid Eyes   Tina Yong	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h55qClu8Rmw&amp;t=27s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h55qClu8Rmw&amp;t=27s</a>
18	Australian Girl Tries Balut (Duck Embryo)	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Y6Iqn2_PU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Y6Iqn2_PU</a>
19	Easy Eye Makeup for Hooded or Asian Eyes	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKZ-nUB_b00">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKZ-nUB_b00</a>
20	Smokey Eye Makeup for Hooded or Asian Eyes	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBNaZMBjrN4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBNaZMBjrN4</a>

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