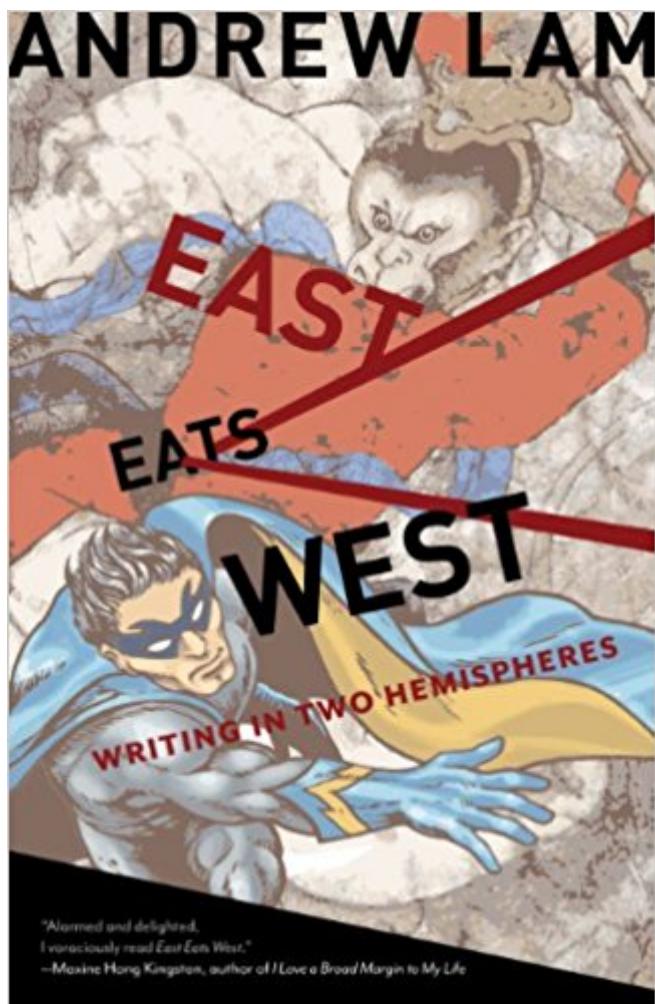


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# East Eats West: Writing In Two Hemispheres



## **Synopsis**

From cuisine and martial arts to sex and self-esteem, East Eats West shines new light on the bridges and crossroads where two hemispheres meld into one worldwide "immigrant nation." In this new nation, with its amalgamation of divergent ideas, tastes, and styles, today's bold fusion becomes tomorrow's classic. But while the space between East and West continues to shrink in this age of globalization, some cultural gaps remain. In this collection of twenty-one personal essays, Andrew Lam, the award-winning author of *Perfume Dreams*, continues to explore the Vietnamese diaspora, this time concentrating not only on how the East and West have changed but how they are changing each other. Lively and engaging, *East Eats West* searches for meaning in nebulous territory charted by very few. Part memoir, part meditation, and part cultural anthropology, *East Eats West* is about thriving in the West with one foot still in the East.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In this compact collection of short personal essays, Vietnamese-American writer Lam considers how quickly the world (and, more specifically, California) has gone global. The most compelling insights come through reflections on his own family's escape from Vietnam in 1975, the east vs. west cultural differences in raising children, and the narrative potency of Manga. Less imaginative are the author's thoughts on Kung Fu (East influences West influences East), the rise of name brand consumerism in Asia, and his discovery of creative writing. The author's intentions are worthwhile even if his results are often predictable. To marvel that eating pho in nearly every country in the world became possible seemingly overnight sounds trite precisely because we've come to expect it,

yet the phenomenon remains worthy of observation and analysis. Lam may not break new ground, but he articulates well what many of us have been thinking. (Sept.) (c) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

"Once an awed young refugee from Vietnam, Andrew Lam can still view America with wonder. Our country is becoming Asian--culture, religion, food, media--all influenced by diasporas from countries that were enemies and allies. Alarmed and delighted, I voraciously read *East Eats West*." --Maxine Hong Kingston, author of *I Love a Broad Margin to My Life*"Five years after *Perfume Dreams*, Lam's *East Eats West: Writing in Two Hemispheres* treats diaspora as novel and nearly uncharted territory...Where the essays and travel narratives in *Perfume Dreams* go down like dry vermouth, the recent publication pours out summer lightness, still mischievous but tart...Somewhere between a refugee and a cosmopolite stands Andrew Lam, a cool cat still shamelessly hustling his wares and over-affecting familiar affects, all in such a disarming manner that you find yourself at a clear disadvantage, yet loving every minute."--Mariam Lam, *Los Angeles Review of Books* "Andrew Lam is an expert time-traveler, collapsing childhood and adulthood; years of war and peace; and the evolution of language in his own life, time, and mind. To read Andrew's work is a joy and a profound journey." --Farai Chideya, reporter and author of *Kiss the Sky* "One of the best American essayists of his generation." --Wayne Karlin, author of *Wandering Souls: Journeys with the Dead and the Living in Viet Nam* "Don't be fooled by the seductive beauty of [Lam's] prose--underneath its iridescent surface, it comes with the wicked kick of Sriracha chili sauce." --Sandip Roy, host of *New America Now* Radio and commentator on NPR's Morning Edition "Andrew Lam devours the American experience with fresh eyes, keen insight, and a lyrical voice. He is a natural storyteller on a journey of discovery across continents and cultures, and we're lucky to be along for the ride." --Scott James, *New York Times* columnist and author of *SoMa* and *The Sower* "In these lovely, wise, probing essays, Andrew Lam not only illuminates the crucial twenty-first-century issues of immigration and cultural identity but the greater, enduring issues of what it means to be human. *East Eats West* is a compelling book, and an important one." --Robert Olen Butler, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*"Future historians will have the pleasure of chronicling how through his deft essays Andrew Lam bridged, fused, and reconciled Asia, Vietnam, Vietnamese America, contemporary California, American culture as a whole, and the English language into one interactive symbiosis, his and all of ours, for now and for decades to come." --Kevin Starr, University Professor and professor of history, University of Southern California "Lam describes our new Pacific world in prose that is subtle, mesmerizing, and unforgettable." --Jeff

Chang, author of *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* and *Who We Be: The Colorization of America* "Lam's story is heartbreakingly inspiring as it tells of the travails, the tragedies, and the successes of the Vietnamese and other Asians who came to America to escape oppression and better their lives and the lives of their children and in the process, blessed and changed America." --Larry Engelmann, author of *Tears before the Rain: An Oral History of the Fall of South Vietnam* "By turns playful, thoughtful, and critically astute, this is his version of the voice the New America speaks, and it is a superbly fresh lyric. *East Eats West* is a sublime dissertation on what happens when the 'marginal' finally arrives at the 'center.'" --Ruben Martinez, Fletcher Jones Chair in Literature and Writing at Loyola Marymount University and author of *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* --Robert Olen Butler, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain* "Future historians will have the pleasure of chronicling how through his deft essays Andrew Lam bridged, fused, and reconciled Asia, Vietnam, Vietnamese America, contemporary California, American culture as a whole, and the English language into one interactive symbiosis, his and all of ours, for now and for decades to come." --Kevin Starr, University Professor and professor of history, University of Southern California "Lam describes our new Pacific world in prose that is subtle, mesmerizing, and unforgettable." --Jeff Chang, author of *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation* and *Who We Be: The Colorization of America* "Lam's story is heartbreakingly inspiring as it tells of the travails, the tragedies, and the successes of the Vietnamese and other Asians who came to America to escape oppression and better their lives and the lives of their children and in the process, blessed and changed America." --Larry Engelmann, author of *Tears before the Rain: An Oral History of the Fall of South Vietnam* "By turns playful, thoughtful, and critically astute, this is his version of the voice the New America speaks, and it is a superbly fresh lyric. *East Eats West* is a sublime dissertation on what happens when the 'marginal' finally arrives at the 'center.'" --Ruben Martinez, Fletcher Jones Chair in Literature and Writing at Loyola Marymount University and author of *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* "Andrew Lam's work weaves journalism and storytelling beautifully. Together the essays craft a new Vietnamese American identity that is invested in neither retrieving 'authentic' culture or claiming America. Lam's vision is shaped by the past, not beholden to it, and trusting of the future." --Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, associate professor of Asian American studies at San Francisco State University "No one writes about being Vietnamese and American with a finer sadness or a richer sense of irony or greater humor than Andrew Lam." --Richard Rodriguez, author of *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* "With a sharp eye on American idiosyncrasies, with a sad understanding of the inevitable distance between immigrant parents and their children, with a nuanced hopefulness for culinary

utopias, and with an unstoppable curiosity to fathom the layered multilingual memories of an immigrant, East Eats West initiates the reader to the fact that 'in the land of plenty there's plenty of irony' too." --Werner Sollors, professor of African and African American studies, Harvard University, author of *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* In these lovely, wise, probing essays, Andrew Lam not only illuminates the crucial twenty-first century issues of immigration and cultural identity, but the greater, enduring issues of what it means to be human. East Eats West is a compelling book, and an important one. • --Robert Olen Butler, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*

This collection of essays was used in a Literature Circle for international students. They enjoyed reading it and were able to relate to the author's experiences. Interesting for so many reasons. The strange title is indicative of Lam's upbeat attitude.

Almost anyone capable of reading will find something to enjoy in Lam's retelling of his journey from Vietnamese to American citizenship. One may read the chapters in order or skip around as each is a complete autobiographical experience.

Lam's new book of essays about his experiences as a Vietnamese American is a treasure. His family stories are touching and his reflective essays challenge my assumptions.

Good book!

Ok book.

I learned about Andrew through a friend of mine. She has chosen one of Andrew's interviews on NPR's All things considered for her English class at NYU and the UN. I asked her why. She only said I should read his works. So I started with *Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora*, and one thing lead to another, I found myself devouring Andrew's second book "East Eats West: Writing in Two Hemispheres". This is why I like this book in a nutshell. 1. I like Andrew's writing style: simple yet beautiful, insightful yet wickedly witty, soft yet daring... 2. I personally have similar identity factors mentioned in the book, and I feel that my thoughts were very well stated. As a Vietnamese growing up absorbing another culture, who thinks and feels differently from my parents, my people, I am glad that there is some body out there who shares it with me. 3. Andrew was born

with a silver spoon in his mouth, as the youngest son of a Saigon's general. He grew up in a villa in the romantic city of Dalat, Vietnam, spoke French at school and Vietnamese at home, came to America at 11 and found himself turning American little by little... I guess this, and being a journalist in the Bay Area give Andrew the sensibility and the insight to feel, think and write about the differences between the Old Continent Asia and the New World America the way he does. I hope to see more of Andrew's works in the future...

Andrew Lam is an NPR commentator. This is his second book of essays, following *Perfume Dreams* in 2005. *East Eats West* is brilliant - shimmering with intelligence, perspective and imagination. At times sensory and vivid, at others, sweeping in perspective, it felt like a tour on the back of a dragon weaving through time, ideas, dreams, culture, movies, smells and sensations; in and out of Lam's memories, thoughts and feelings, in, out and around Asia and America. Here are some lines that jumped out at me. "Vietnam, its language, its memories, are reduced to a kind of lullaby, which is to say, visceral and yet out of the quotidian of my life." "Lee single-handedly brought the heroic Asian male image, long suffering from invisibility, onto the world stage, so how can I not weep at his passing." "One summer afternoon many years ago I came home to rob my parents of their American dream." "...to live in the Bay Area, where I am now from, is to live at the crossroads of a global society. It's many a tourist's mistake to define the place materially, and it is true that the things it is known for - arching bridges and grand ports and famed high-tech companies - evoke, in many ways, what often transpires here: the ability to span distances and transgress borders." "To live in the Bay Area fully is to learn to see the many dimensions of the world simultaneously; where others hear a cacophony, the resident of cosmopolitan reality discerns a symphony. It entails the ability to overcome the paralysis that may be caused by many conflicting ideas, by finding and inventing new connections between them." Lam says he writes to be whole: "He knew it even before he could fully articulate it: between East and West lay a terrain that needed to be charted by stories, fused by his new eyes and imagination, and he needed to tell those stories if he ever hoped to be whole again." "I seek to marry the New World to the Old Continent, fantasies to memories, and, through the act of writing, reimagine the hemispheres as one." If his writing is at all as synthesizing for him as it is for me as a reader, Lam must be feeling great. As someone who grew up in many countries, and would take the reverse journey from West to East, through travel, language, marriage and cooking, *East Eats West* resonates on all channels. The essays are contemporary and historically and culturally illuminating. Author Maxine Hong Kingston writes of Andrew Lam's book, "Alarmed and delighted, I voraciously read *East Eats West*." I loved Maxine Hong Kingston's books. I'm loving reading

Andrew Lam.

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