

## **6 Books Based in East Asia by Black Authors**

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Despite the publishing industry's attempts to boost and publish diverse books, I've often thought about how little there is about being a Black person in Asia, both in fiction and non-fiction. Regardless of the popularity within online spaces for content, the demand isn't high within the publishing industry.

The discovery of reading *Black in Asia* by Spill Stories, in particular, has been the motivation to create this reading list and highlight books within this category, as it's the preferred reading space that I find myself in. As a Black woman who has lived in Asia, I think it's very important to read books from authors who have also lived in the continent and can talk about their personal experiences to readers at greater length.

So because of this, I have laid out a criteria for finding books similar to *Black in Asia*: an author must live or have lived in Asia and the book's setting must be in Asia. The latter is incredibly important because readers need to be able to envision themselves within Asia. For this list, I reached out to authors with books that I searched vigorously for that I believe fulfil the requirements. Below, I present to you a list of six books with the aim to encourage more people to read and also write more about being a Black person in Asia.

### **Black in Asia by the Spill Stories writer's community**

Back in 2020, *Black in Asia* was published by the Spill Stories' writer's community as a response to the BLM movement. *Black in Asia* highlights the diverse voices of Black people who have lived around the continent with experiences to share. The anthology has over 20 writers with their own stories set in countries such as Korea, Hong Kong, Thailand and Singapore. Every writer has an anecdote that readers will enjoy reading about; from coming to Hong Kong as a refugee to being a model for the Chinese Amazon website, Taobao. To date, it's probably the most versatile anthology to uplift the voices of Black people in Asia. A book that has influenced readers in more ways than one and has helped me find my preferred reading space.

### **Fifty Words for Rain By Asha Lemmie**

The New York Times Bestseller *Fifty Words for Rain* by Asha Lemmie is an extraordinary coming-of-age book set in 1948 Kyoto. The protagonist, Noriko 'Nori' Kamiza, is a child of mixed African-American and Japanese heritage who was born into a prominent family. Nori is concealed in the attic of her grandparents' imperial estate just for being a 'hafu,' (otherwise known as mixed-race people in Japanese). She forms a formidable bond with her older half-brother Akira and because of this, Nori is motivated to fight to change her life. Asha Lemmie uses her astounding writing abilities to make readers empathise with Nori. The book immerses readers in an eye-opening, emotional journey that sheds light on prejudices, family traditions and personal growth. It's an amazing story that's hard to put down.

### **The Black Traveler's Guide To Incheon, South Korea by The Blerd Explorer**

After living in Korea for a few years, The Blerd Explorer published *The Black Traveler's Guide To Incheon, South Korea* which stands out as a perfect book to advise readers to 'travel before you live in Asia.' The Blerd Explorer takes readers on a journey to Korea's international airport city, Incheon and why he believes they should go there instead of populated cities like Seoul or Busan. It goes into depth about the best locations for cuisine, hiking, and food. The Blerd Explorer also shares safety warnings, providing a Black person's perspective of Incheon and

what to expect while travelling in Korea for first-timers. The series continues with the second book in Daegu and more books are to come in the future.

### **Black Dragon: Afro Asian Performance and the Martial Arts Imagination (Black Performance and Cultural Criticism) by Zachary F. Price**

Within Black Dragon: Afro Asian Performance and the Martial Arts Imagination, the book gets readers to think about Asia and Asian cultural production and performance from cuisine to martial arts while gaining an understanding of the impact of economic, social, and historical conditions. As quoted by Price, performance in itself has a different connotation 'as behaviour and the choreography of human actions (repetitive acts, gestures, and routines).' For example, who gets to claim the cultural properties of Asia? This is one of the many questions that Price seeks to answer within the book. Definitely an insightful read!

### **Tokyo Firewall by Elizabeth Wilkerson**

Set in the 1990s when the internet was still new and exciting, Tokyo Firewall by Elizabeth Wilkerson is a great cyber-thriller with a unique plot. The book centres on Allison Crane who follows her boyfriend to Japan without a job or friends in the country, where she finds herself unable to adapt to Japanese culture. Desperate for company, Alison logs onto a cyber chat room and starts talking to a Japanese man. Soon after, a xenophobic troll begins threatening and cyber-stalking her and she is forced to stand her ground or face her identity and actions being exposed in real life. It's an unusual but captivating story with Wilkerson's well-researched knowledge of Japanese customs and culture embedded within this book. You can't guess what will happen next, which is what makes Tokyo Firewall so great!

### **The Korean: Single and Obese: Then Kimchi Changed Everything! by Africa Yoon**

Situated in both Korea and America, The Korean: Single and Obese: Then Kimchi Changed Everything! started when the author, originally from Cameroon, was called fat by a halmoni (Korean for grandma) in a H-Mart in America. As upsetting as it was, Africa Yoon begins to work on herself and this memoir reflects on the journey that she goes on. The book presents a deeply personal portrayal of Yoon's health struggles, the obstacles she came up against such as meeting her husband's family in Seoul along with her relationship with food in both countries. The author's spirit and persistence are what drive this book to be a favourite to read of mine.