

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field.*

Edited by Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2014.

Pp. 236. ISBN 10: 0824839986; ISBN 13: 978-0824839987.

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doi:10.1017/S1479591416000255

The editors of *Transpacific Studies* see this work as a sequel to the 1998 volume *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* edited by Arif Dirlik. They seek critical and subaltern perspectives to study a new field of inquiry which will combine the lessons of Asian Studies, Asian-American Studies, and American Studies into a re-figurative dynamic. As such, each of the above disciplines must be shaken from their routine pathways and familiar boundaries and draw inspiration from the contemporary movements of people and scholars – as well as goods and ideas – as both the stuff and the frame of this emergent region. They also aspire to problematize the relationship between mobility and fixities. While recognizing that the relatively immobile communities and structures tend to lose out in the trans-Pacific dynamic, it behooves scholars to also deepen their understanding of how the mobile factors, especially money, capital, ideas, microbes, among others, reshape or interact with the immobile.

Beginning with a warning and a plea from Singapore scholars to avoid US-centrism in this emergent regional research agenda, Weiqiang Lin and Brenda Yeoh draw our attention to realms that are not dominated by the US role in the Pacific and to not think of Asians especially as passive respondents. Lin and Yeoh draw attention to the long history of overseas Chinese in the Pacific region, but of course there are many players in this historical scenario. Consideration of the players, in turn, draws our attention to the blurred outer edges of the region, as perhaps must be the case when seeking to frame a space that is multiply-crossed by multi-scalar processes and forces, from the local to the global. Granted, the Latin American countries, Canada and Australia – which are relatively neglected in this volume – can become a more salient part of the region than they are now if they begin to play a more active role, but can Russia or even faraway India become part of it? In other words, we are not seeking a bounded definition, but the parameters of defining a region.

Looking to other players, from a power-politics or dominance perspective, perhaps more attention could be given in this research to the relationship of Pacific islanders with the sub-hegemony of Australia as well as the challenge to the US from Japan in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the geo-political rivalries of the Pacific, a subject which raises its head once again with the growing military power of China in the South China Sea and the US pivot – or re-balancing – towards Asia needs to be grasped in the historical context of twentieth century geo-political entanglements with more players than have hitherto been acknowledged.

Two of the essays following, by Heonik Kwon and Biao Xiang, do indeed deal with power politics in the region, exactly focusing on the US and China respectively. Kwon reminds readers that perhaps one of the most powerful ideological screens of the Cold War was the term 'cold' itself, which served up a vision of the period as a highly dangerous but rational containment of violence. This same war in the Asian Pacific – and one should add, equally significantly in Latin America – was a bloody, hot war perpetrated largely by the US and its allies and costing millions of lives. The essays by John

Carlos Rowe and Yén Lê Espiritu reveal how the vast empire of US garrison stations across the Pacific, especially in the Philippines and in US-administered territories of Guam and other small islands, during this period was mobilized not only for war in Indochina but also several related projects such as refugee transfers.

While Kwon seems to take inspiration from the post-colonial scholarship of Edward Said and Dipesh Chakrabarty, among others, he also chastises them for focusing so exclusively on the pre-Cold War colonial relations of dominance at the expense of understanding the new forms of imperial domination during the Cold War. This seems rather an unfair argument, since the locus or loci of the two types of domination are different in the different periods and one cannot be expected to treat all forms of domination in one go. Nonetheless, the two forms are inter-related not only in that the latter often borrowed forms and techniques from the former, but as John Carlos Rowe reveals, Pacific islanders frame their victimization in post-colonial terms. Rowe, in his fine essay in the volume does do justice to this relationship.

Parallel to Kwon's essay is Biao Xiang's piece on China as a rising Pacific (and, of course, global) power. Xiang makes the interesting argument that just as colonized societies imitated the colonizing imperial powers' nation-state form to claim sovereignty and equivalence, so too China is designing itself or becoming more like the US as it becomes a superpower. Xiang declares that China has re-invented itself as 'neo-statist', a political form which prioritizes the realpolitik of the Chinese state at the expense of historical nationalist claims and celebration of the Chinese nationalist culture. As such it claims principal loyalty not to the nation but to the state and its goals. While it is true that the US *enacts* its superpower status as a state power, it is not as clear that nationalist historical claims are as minimal as Xiang believes. Chinese state ideology is as much embedded in these claims as far as justifications to its domestic constituencies are concerned, as the US used the ideals of Manifest Destiny or Freedom and Democracy domestically in the pre-war and post-war periods to pursue its goals abroad.

There are several essays in the volume which deal with cultural and ethnographic topics – exploring people to people relations and cinematic or fictional representations of circulations within the region. Some of these essays are so densely embedded in the literature and the quotational habits of cultural studies (where long quotations from profound philosophers often stand for argument) that it is hard to fathom their meaning. Perhaps they require a more leisurely format to unfold their materials and arguments in order to make coherent contributions to trans-Pacific studies.

Other essays by Nancy Lutkehaus, Hung Cam Thai, and the short personal piece by Yunte Huang deal sensitively with inter-personal and inter-cultural experiences across the region. Thai's article on the conflicting conceptions of money and its uses between Vietnamese migrant remitters in the US and recipients in Vietnam reveal a condition that is perhaps common to several Pacific rim countries. This was the case among Korean migrants to the US in the 1950s and '60s and who, by the 1980s, frequently became less prosperous than their relatives who were left behind in impoverished conditions and whom they sought to help. It makes us wonder if the dynamic of mature capitalism in the post-WWII Pacific region generates a velocity of circulations and exchanges that can reverse the fortunes of remitters and remitees within a lifespan.

All in all, this volume has taken an important step in developing methods, perspectives, and approaches to a new field of inquiry. The editors should be congratulated for undertaking this ambitious project that befits the brave new region they seek to chart.