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## Journal of Transnational American Studies

### Title

"Introduction: Oceanic Archives, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Transpacific American Studies"

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3xp8s2z0>

### Journal

Journal of Transnational American Studies, 10(2)

### Author

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### Publication Date

2019

### DOI

10.5070/T8102046353

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# **Oceanic Archives, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Transpacific American Studies**

# Oceanic Archives, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Transpacific American Studies

*Journal of Transnational American Studies* 10.2 (Winter/Spring 2019–20) Forward

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Hong Kong University Press  
The University of Hong Kong  
Pokfulam Road  
Hong Kong  
<https://hkupress.hku.hk>

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ISBN 978-988-8455-77-5 (*Hardback*)

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“Memories of Murder: The Other Korean War (in Viet Nam)” was first published as part of *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* by Viet Thanh Nguyen (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), ©2016 by Viet Thanh Nguyen.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed and bound by Paramount Printing Co. Ltd., Hong Kong, China

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## Introduction

### *Oceanic Archives, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Transpacific American Studies*

Yuan Shu

Ever since Shelley Fisher Fishkin popularized the phrase “the transnational turn in American studies,” at the American Studies Association annual convention in Atlanta in 2004,<sup>1</sup> American studies as transnational practice has not only aimed to address what Donald Pease calls its “intelligibility,”<sup>2</sup> which involves methodology, periodization, objects of analysis, and geographical locations, but it has also witnessed a paradigm shift in the field from the transatlantic to the transpacific.<sup>3</sup> If the transatlantic entails Euro-American cultural and historical exchanges and African American experiences in coerced migration and labor across the Atlantic Ocean, then the transpacific, which incorporates the experiences of Asians and Pacific Islanders, brings up a new set of questions and challenges. From the outset, transpacific American studies has confronted the question of how to position itself in relation to the existing fields of Asian studies and Pacific studies and also to the growing field of Asian American studies. In Anna Brickhouse’s words, we cannot dismiss the possibility of “Western academic imperialism” even though it is not an imminent problem.<sup>4</sup> If we invoke the transnational as the new field imaginary at the center of American studies as Fishkin challenges us to do, there also arises the question of what constitutes a common thread through American studies, Asian studies, and Pacific studies. In other words, what do we make of Eric Hayot’s provocative appropriation of the transnational turn as “the Asian turns”?<sup>5</sup> Above all, the transpacific as the most promising, vigorous, and dynamic dimensions of transnational American studies should probe the critical questions of how to move beyond a simple negation of American exceptionalism and how to engage the Asia Pacific and Pacific Islands in a productive way that would generate alternative discourses grounded in non-Western and Third World epistemologies and generating new systems of knowledge production and dissemination.

It is precisely in this sense that we invoke the trope “oceanic archives” as the material basis of such critical interventions in the transnational turn of American studies. By “oceanic archives,” we first and foremost engage what Ann Laura Stoler articulates as the “politics of comparison,”<sup>6</sup> which serves as a new critical



methodology for interrogating commonality among all empires of exception and also for underscoring similarity connecting the key moments of US imperial expansions and conquests. If Stoler focuses on the “predicaments of the tactile and unseen”<sup>7</sup> as a controversial space and a problematic time of empire, then we examine the transpacific as both spatial and temporal dimensions of empire by retrieving what has seemingly been lost, forgotten, or downplayed inside and outside state-bound archives, state legal preoccupations, and state prioritized projects. As Yuan Shu and Donald Pease argue that the United States looked backward to the Atlantic World for origin and inspiration of US history and philosophy but looked forward to the Pacific for economic expansion and military conquest,<sup>8</sup> we also aim to unveil some key moments in the transpacific experiences of the US Empire, in which its continuing westward expansion functioned as an extension of the European conquest of the Americas as well as appropriation of the “Asian Pacific” as the final destination of the Western civilizing mission, which had been economic, military, and religious in essence.<sup>9</sup>

By “oceanic archives,” we also seek to engage what Walter Mignolo calls “decolonial thinking,” which conjures up the Asia Pacific and Pacific Islands in their common cause of resistance to American expansionism, militarization, and exceptionalism, and which equally points to indigenous epistemologies as genuine alternatives to Western ontology, epistemology, and knowledge production. To Mignolo, decolonial thinking as a process begins with questioning the assumption of a universal human nature and succeeds by changing the terms of the conversation and the rules of the game. He notes, “If we start from the premise that there is no universal common ground of experiences and that situated knowledge has to be spelled out in the colonial matrix (rather than in an assumed history of humankind), we shall then spell out in what sense, decolonially speaking, knowledge and experience are marked (situated) through and by colonial and imperial differences.”<sup>10</sup> In this vein, oceanic archives of the Asia Pacific and Pacific Islands offer different kinds of situated experiences and knowledge and speak to the very discrepancies, contradictions, and predicaments located in and generated by the empire. In other words, they are resources for rethinking indigenous epistemologies and regenerating non-Western knowledge production and dissemination.

Indeed, if the formation of “the Atlantic World” was contingent on the emergence of what Mignolo identifies as “the Atlantic commercial circuit” in the sixteenth century,<sup>11</sup> which would converge on the colonization of the Americas, the slave trade, and the founding of the American republic,<sup>12</sup> then the “Pacific Century” could always be recapitulated as contradictions, competitions, and uncertainties among local and global powers, which have haunted and shaped the region to the present.<sup>13</sup> In his remapping of the Pacific as spheres of influences of Western powers from “the Spanish Lake” to “the American Lake,” Arif Dirlik argues that the Pacific posed as a major contradiction between its European invention in concept and its Asian materiality in content, which revolved around economic activities and

population migrations throughout the region for centuries. Such mapping of the Pacific not only offers a historicized understanding of the ocean as a construction of the West but also defines the ocean as sites of resistance with new questions on its changing meanings and implications in the twenty-first century.

Against such historical and theoretical backgrounds, we first explore the trajectory of the Euro-American consciousness and movement from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast of the United States and from North America to the Asia Pacific, and suggest the specific ways in which Asian, Asian American, and transpacific studies intervene in American exceptionalism as alternatives. Next, we consider the formation and development of the Asia Pacific in terms of what Kuan-Hsing Chen calls “Asia as method,” and the construction of the Pacific Islands in relation to what Epeli Hau’ofa defines as “our sea of islands” and “the ocean in us.” While Chen insists on decolonization as a mutual process for the colonized and the colonizer alike, Hau’ofa envisions a new indigenous way of rereading geography and rewriting humanity against neocolonialist and neo-imperialist practice. By investigating the transpacific as moments of military, cultural, and geopolitical contentions as well as sites of global economic integration and resistance, we develop transpacific American studies as a new critical paradigm in transnational American studies.

### Whose Pacific? Empire, Expansion, and Archives

If the Pacific as a site of contradictions has been manifested in the gap between its Euro-American concept and its Asian content from the outset, then we should interrogate how the concept mismatches the content by revisiting the oceanic archives from both sides of the Pacific. In her documentation of American imagining of the Pacific, M. Consuelo León W. introduces its literary and cartographical backgrounds, which could date back to thirteenth-century European travel writing and to the eighteenth-century North American writing of “scientific exploration” as represented by George Vancouver’s *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean*. She foregrounds Thomas Jefferson as a facilitator of such imagination, which underlays the Louisiana Purchase and the Lewis and Clark expedition.<sup>14</sup> By navigating through Jefferson’s “vast geographical knowledge,” “political pragmatism,” and “concrete government policies,” she suggests that “the image of the Pacific had been completely consolidated in American minds” by the time Jefferson left the presidency. Indeed, Jefferson’s “passage to India” would not only expand the American republic from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific coast and project its imperial power and imagination upon China and Japan as its destinations, but it also would partially fulfill Christopher Columbus’s original goal to reach “the rich lands described by Marco Polo and the romantic Sir John Mandeville,” which had designated China, Japan, and India.<sup>15</sup>

“The American errand into the wilderness” of the Pacific began with several Bostonian businessmen, who went to Hawai‘i in 1833 and started the first sugar

plantation in the island kingdom.<sup>16</sup> But it was really the annexation of California and the acquisition of the West Coast and the Southwest in 1848 that prompted Aaron Palmer, a “Counsellor of the Supreme Court of the United States,” to submit a proposal to Congress, recommending for expansion of US markets into Asia and importation of Chinese workers to further the development of US industries. He declared, “The commodious port of San Francisco is destined to become the great emporium of our commerce on the Pacific; and as soon as it is connected by a railroad with the Atlantic states, [it] will become the most eligible point of departure for steamers to . . . China.”<sup>17</sup> As for the transcontinental railroad and the swamp in California, Palmer thought of no other than Chinese laborers, “No people in all the East are so well adapted for clearing wild lands and raising every species of agricultural product . . . as the Chinese.”<sup>18</sup>

It was through Secretary of State William Seward, who signed the Burlingame-Seward Treaty of 1868, that large numbers of Chinese laborers would be brought to the American West to complete the transcontinental railroad in 1869. And Seward’s vision and sense of history, which Richard Drinnon defines as “the long view,” extended the dream of Jefferson and reached right back to the original vision of Columbus: “What was Columbus doing in 1492 if not bumping into outlying islands of the land mass that blocked his passage to India?”<sup>19</sup> In making this connection with the Old World, Seward believed that empire must make its way constantly westward to reach its final destination: “it must continue to move on westward until the tides of the renewed and the decaying civilizations of the world meet on the shores of the Pacific Ocean.”<sup>20</sup> Yet it was through another secretary of state, John Hay, a disciple of John Quincy Adams and William Seward and proponent of the “Open Door” policy to China, who on the occasion of commemorating “Fifty Years of the Republican Party” famously declared that the United States had advanced a “general plan of opening a field of enterprise in those distant regions where the Far West becomes the Far East.”<sup>21</sup>

As the Far West of North America became the Far East of Northeast Asia, Asian laborers started coming to Hawai‘i and the United States in large numbers as part of the US economic expansion and globalization of Anglo-American capitalism. Sucheng Chan notes, “During the second half of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth, almost a million people from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, and India emigrated to the United States and to Hawaii.”<sup>22</sup> These demands and movements, whether we call them “push,” “pull,” or “means” in historiography and migration studies, provided the “content” of the transpacific and intensified a globalized and racialized class formation and development in the United States. Charles Crocker, one of “the Big Four” of the Central Pacific Railroad Company, made this statement in his testimony in Congress on the congressional investigation of Chinese immigration: “After we got Chinamen to work, we took the more intelligent of the white laborers and made foremen of them. Several of them who never expected, never had a dream that they were going to be anything but

shovelers of dirt, hewers of wood and drawers of water are now respectable farmers, owning farms. They got a start by controlling Chinese labor on our railroad.”<sup>23</sup>

If the US state-bound archives did not include anything on the Chinese “middle passage” across the Pacific or the treatment after their arrival in Hawai‘i, North America, Central and Latin America, the Chinese and Chinese American “oceanic archives” filled in the gap. In his report on the conditions of Chinese laborers in Cuba and Peru after his trip of investigation to these countries, Yung Wing, the first Chinese American educated in the United States (with a BA in English from Yale College in 1854), detailed how these laborers had been treated worse than the African slaves in Cuba and Peru and what ordeal they had endured in their “middle passage” to the Americas. He thus describes it in his autobiography published in 1909: “My report was accompanied with two dozen photographs of Chinese coolies, showing how their backs had been lacerated and torn, scarred and disfigured by the lash. I had these photographs taken in the night, unknown to anyone except the victims themselves, who were, at my request, collected and assembled together for the purpose. I knew that these photographs would tell a tale of cruelty and inhumanity perpetuated by the owners of haciendas, which would be beyond cavil and dispute.”<sup>24</sup> Yung’s report finally convinced the Qing government to intervene and terminate the coolie trade between China and the Americas.

Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, Chinese historians, particularly those with advanced training in the United States, have explored in-depth the coolie trade to Latin America and the complicity of US merchants and diplomats in this inhumane practice. In Zhu Shijia’s work, *Historical Materials Concerning U.S. Persecution of Chinese Laborers*, published in 1958 and celebrated as a monumental work on Chinese immigration to the United States during the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>25</sup> Zhu devoted a substantial part of the book to the theme of “U.S. Criminal Acts of Kidnapping and Defrauding Chinese Laborers”<sup>26</sup> and collected materials from the US National Archives and the Library of Congress and also from the Qing Dynasty’s Zhongli Yamen Archives in Beijing. In the first part, Zhu implicates that the US government had been aware of the activities of kidnapping and coaxing Chinese laborers to go to the Americas. He devotes two sections to this theme, “American Consul (in Amoy which is now Xiamen) Charles W. Le Gendre Coaxes Chinese Laborers to Go Overseas” and “American Companies Coax Chinese Laborers to Go Overseas,” which document the involvement of both US merchants and diplomats in the trade, such as the American Consul in Canton (Guangzhou) Charles P. Lincoln. Zhu includes a correspondence between John E. Ward, the US minister to China under President James Buchanan, and Secretary of State Lewis Cass in 1860:<sup>27</sup>

When a Chinaman has been kidnapped or stolen, he is taken to the first vessel and asked if he wishes to emigrate. Should he answer in the negative, the captain, with great apparent honesty, declares he cannot receive him. His captors then leave the ship with him, and he is held in the water, or tied up by the thumbs, or cold water

is trickled down his back, or some other torture inflicted, until he consents to go, when he is taken to the next ship, and the same question repeated, “Are you willing to emigrate?” If his reluctance to become an exile is still unsubdued, he is again returned to his captors, and this process repeated until a consent is wrung from him, when he is received as one of the “willing emigrants.”<sup>28</sup>

In focusing on such details in correspondence between US officials, Zhu contends that there was no fundamental difference between Portuguese/Spanish and British/American ways of recruiting or transporting Chinese laborers to the Americas even though the latter declared that their vessels would not be allowed to engage in any coolie trade. He also reveals that the US government had been well informed of the practice of “free emigration” specified in the Burlingame-Seward Treaty of 1868. To Zhu, Euro-American workers’ violent responses to Chinese workers were not so much examples of racism than instances of how the US capitalist class sought to replace class struggle with racial conflict.

Similarly, in his work, *A Literary Anthology on Resistance to the U.S. Exclusion of Chinese Laborers*, published in 1960,<sup>29</sup> literary critic A Yin locates a connection between the Chinese coolie trafficking and the African slave trade and explores the similar violent treatment of these laborers in the recruiting/capturing process and the “middle passage.” In his introduction, A Yin quotes extensively from chapter 29 of the novel *Bitter Society*, which, with its entire inclusion in the anthology, was allegedly based on the oral history of a few surviving laborers as stated in the novel’s preface. The quoted paragraphs describe in graphic detail how the workers were unable to move their legs upon their arrival after months spent in chains and captivity and how they were severely beaten by impatient sailors and the ship captain. For example, upon arrival, the captain and sailors found more than eighty dead laborers, their decaying bodies mixed with the smell of dried blood and urine created a repugnant scene in the dark and humid bottom deck of the ship.<sup>30</sup> A Yin authenticates this specific scene as an accurate representation of the “middle passage” of the Chinese laborers coming to the Americas and even incorporates into the anthology chapters from Lin Shu’s translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to highlight his sense of shared experiences of suffering, oppression, and exploitation.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Pacific Islands: Military Control, Nuclear Testing, and Oceanic Archives**

If the movement between East Asia and North America defined the Pacific only in terms of East and West, there was another dimension or structure of the Pacific, which would be geographical and hierarchical in nature. Matt Matsuda describes it as “a geography distinguished by a famous fluid distinctions between north and south” in global economy and geopolitics.<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, the north represented a new frontier of capitalism that would feature the theater of East Asia, where labor migrations and capital flows had centered in Japan, China, Hawai‘i,



and the Philippines. On the other hand, the south designated a space of fantasy and imagination for the north, varying from a wasteland of noble savages like Caliban in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to a paradise for Euro-American adventures, which had been popularized first by Herman Melville's *Typee* and then by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein's *South Pacific*. If US economic activities in the Asia Pacific concerned the south only in terms of whaling industry and constant renaming it from the "South Seas" to the "South Pacific," then its military activities have fundamentally impacted its ecologies and environments.

Starting with the overthrow of the kingdom government under Queen Lili'uokalani in 1893 and the annexation of Hawai'i in 1898, the United States continued its westward expansion, which Takaki calls "the masculine thrust toward Asia."<sup>33</sup> The mastermind behind this movement was Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, who had authored numerous articles and books on the importance of rebuilding US sea power and colonizing the Asia Pacific as the future of the US Empire. In his work, *The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Policies*, among others, Mahan interprets the significance of the annexation of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War in 1898 as one more step toward China as naval bases and coaling stations.<sup>34</sup> With support and collaboration with President Theodore Roosevelt, Mahan not only brought the concept of the Pacific Age into the American political discourse and public consciousness but also underscored his main vision that the Pacific would replace the Atlantic as the center of future world interest and struggle.<sup>35</sup> Christopher Connery resituates Mahan's concepts of military power as sea and land ideologies in the history of US expansion and emergence as a global power.<sup>36</sup>

What is often forgotten in the critique of US military expansion in the Pacific is the ocean itself, its islands and island population, who suffered from US militarization of the islands and nuclear fallout throughout the Cold War. In her essay, "The Myth of Isolates: Ecosystem Ecologies in the Nuclear Pacific," a case study that traces the origin of the science of ecosystem ecology to the nuclear tests conducted by the US military during the Cold War, Elizabeth DeLoughrey observes that few scholar in the field of ecology today understands the indebtedness of the Age of Ecology to the Atomic Age, which defines a "multi-constitutive relationship between radioactive militarism and the study of the environment."<sup>37</sup> She writes, "American environmentalism and militarism are paradoxically and mutually imbricated, particularly in their construction of the isolate. Thus the ecosystem paradigm relies on the idea of a closed system, a concept that was constituted by the island laboratory and the irradiated atoll and perpetuated by the aerial view utilized by AEC films (the Atomic Energy Commission) to introduce US viewers to the newly acquired island territories in the Pacific Islands."<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, with the acquisition of Guam in the Mariana Islands as part of the booty in the Spanish-American War in 1898, the United States started using the Pacific Islands for its military expansion and strategic interests. With the military triumph over the Japanese Empire in the Pacific theater of World War II, the United

States took over most of the Pacific Islands granted to Japan in 1920 and placed them under the US Navy's "Trust Territory."<sup>39</sup> At the very end of the Pacific War, the United States created a Joint Task Force to develop a nuclear weapons testing program and turned the Marshall Islands into a "Proving Ground" and a nuclear colony. According to the US Department of Energy's Open Net, "The Marshall Islands, located in the central Pacific Ocean, are part of the US Trust Territory of the Pacific. Between 1946 and 1962, 67 bomb tests were conducted in or around the Marshall Islands. The largest of these tests was the 1954 *Bravo* shot, with an explosive force equal to nearly 1,000 Hiroshima-type atomic bombs."<sup>40</sup> According to the calculation of an article in *Washington Post* in 2015, the impact of nuclear fallout was tremendous: "If their combined explosive power was parceled evenly over that 12-year period, it would equal 1.6 Hiroshima-size explosions per day."<sup>41</sup> The nuclear fallout was not contained to any isolated atoll but spread globally. If it was *Baker* detonated in Bikini Atoll rather than the two atomic bombs exploding in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which "first brought the issue of radioactivity compellingly to the nation's consciousness,"<sup>42</sup> then it was *Bravo*, which "catalyzed a worldwide outcry against the H-bomb and forced the AEC to more thoroughly assess the radiation impact of its weapons testing program."<sup>43</sup> DeLoughrey notes, "In the antinuclear activism that followed, the militarized island became configured as a synecdoche for the world. The irradiated atoll, as an 'anti-island' or 'zero-island,' became a catalyst and signifier for a global consciousness about an increasingly militarized planet."<sup>44</sup>

In retrieving and uncovering this history from the oceanic archives of empire and the Pacific Islands, DeLoughrey offers us new perspectives on empire and its practice. To begin with, isolation was no longer a descriptive term in the colonial and imperial vocabulary but has evolved to be a concept that would have strong implications for policy and decision-making for the colonial and imperial regime. Second, science and technology have never been ideologically neutral but often served the purpose of Western colonial and military regimes in their expansion and conquest.

### Decolonization, Reimagining of Asia, and Transpacific American Studies

If the concept of the "Pacific Age" was first proposed by Japanese political economist Inagaki Manjiro in 1892 and would be promoted by the Japanese nation-state throughout the twentieth century,<sup>45</sup> then we need first to discuss the relationship between Japan and the United States before we can address the question of decolonization. According to Pekka Korhonen, not only was Japan the first nation-state to propose the concept of the "Pacific Age," but it was also the only non-Western country that had ever been accepted by Mahan as "an adoptively European power and part of the European commonwealth just like the United States."<sup>46</sup> Back in 1900, Mahan believed that "the dynamic Teutonic race" as represented by Germany, England, and the United States "would carry on their shoulders the main burden of

advancing Christian civilization during the century that had just begun.”<sup>47</sup> The main collision would be the Asiatic race, which represented an old civilization, stagnant and corrupted.

The notion of the “Pacific Age” continued to be promoted by Japan and the United States following the establishment of the Institute of Pacific Relations in Honolulu as a NGO in 1925. At the institute’s second conference in Honolulu in 1927, Sawayanagi Masatarō, president of the Imperial Educational Association of Japan, announced that “the Pacific Ocean is gradually becoming the center of the world.”<sup>48</sup> Then in 1967, the idea of the Pacific Age was revived by Japanese economist Kojima Kiyoshi and advanced by the Japanese Foreign Minister, Miki Takeo as the “Asia-Pacific Age.”<sup>49</sup> The term finally gained momentum in 1980, when the total value of transpacific commerce outweighed that of transatlantic commerce for the first time in human history.<sup>50</sup>

The years of 1927 and 1967 marked two important moments of Japan’s role in the Pacific, one under British hegemony from the late nineteenth century to the 1920s, and the other under US hegemony from 1945 to the present.<sup>51</sup> In the 1920s, Japan unveiled its imperialist ambition by invading Northern China and continuing its colonization of the Korean peninsula, while “the United States and Great Britain chose to do little about it, save for a lot of rhetoric about the ‘open door.’”<sup>52</sup> And the enunciation of the Asia-Pacific Age in 1967 defined a moment of success of the US policy toward Japan since the end of World War II in 1945 and then the beginning of the Cold War in 1947: “Dean Acheson and George Kennan masterminded this repositioning of Japan in the world system, by deciding in 1947 to place Japan as an engine of the world economy, a US-defined ‘economic animal,’ shorn of its prewar military and political clout.”<sup>53</sup> Cumings read the success of Japan as bad news for the rest of the Asia Pacific and offered a pessimistic picture of these countries as “the Third World in our midst,” which would find “no exit in the ‘Pacific Rim community,’ save hard work at low pay.”<sup>54</sup> Contrary to an optimistic world in the 1990s, which celebrated the collapse of the Soviet Communist block as the end of history in the Hegelian sense and embraced neoliberal capitalism as the golden straightjacket fitting all,<sup>55</sup> Cumings made a rather gloomy picture of the status quo: “The Third World is dominated by the advanced countries in a way unprecedented since the colonial era, with no convincing antisystem model to follow. It is outside the loop of the prosperity of recent years, and therefore is the prime source of war, instability, and class conflict.”<sup>56</sup>

Decolonization in this context has to begin with Japanese reflections upon its own role in the Pacific Age. In his lecture, “Asia as Method,” Takeuchi Yoshimi resituates the modernization of Japan in a trilateral relationship among Japan, Europe, and China, and critiques the externality of Japanese modernization as the opposite of the internality of Chinese modernity.<sup>57</sup> To him, in establishing a modern nation-state and incorporating modern culture modeled on West Europe and North America, the Japanese state superficially “sugarcoated its outside with



western civilization” but in fact “maintained its feudal structure.”<sup>58</sup> Takeuchi reads the result of this as “the internal division of Japan of the Asian and the non-Asian,”<sup>59</sup> which shows contempt for China and other Asian countries on the one hand but sustains good relations with the United States on the other: “Yet the fact that Japan enjoys good relations with the United States while peace remains to be made with the other Allied Powers means that the war is still unresolved. Japan is still at war with China.”<sup>60</sup> He concludes by redefining “Asia as method” in two different senses. First, Asians must embrace their own cultural values as method or rather self-formation of subjectivity. Second, Asia must re-embrace and change the West so much so that Western outstanding cultural values such as equality and democracy would cover all and create real universality in the true sense of the word.

The epistemological and ontological implications of Takeuchi’s argument is further articulated and elaborated by Kuan-Hsing Chen in terms of the importance of transforming the existing knowledge structure and our own subjectivities in terms of cultural locations. In a book that bears the same title, *Asia as Method*,<sup>61</sup> Chen seeks to achieve two objectives. First, he uses the idea of Asia as “an imaginary anchoring point,” or rather new points of reference for each other among Asian nation-states so that Asian identities could be transformed and reconstructed. Moreover, Chen further employs Asia as method to readdress “the tripartite problematic of decolonization, deimperialization, and de-cold war.” He notes, “Historical processes of imperialization, colonization, and the cold war have become mutually entangled structures, which have shaped and conditioned both intellectual and popular knowledge production.”<sup>62</sup> If New York, London, and Paris have regularly served as sites for intellectual conversations and critical investigations, Chen raises the possibility of expanding them to include new sites in Asia such as Seoul, Kyoto, Singapore, Bangalore, Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Taipei.

Similarly, in rethinking the politics of imagining Asia, Wang Hui interrogates the modern Japanese notion of “East Asia” as grounded in European culturalism, which would not see any contradiction in its practice of “shedding Asia” and “invading Asia.” He interprets the tragedy of modern Japan in terms of “incomplete westernization” and “incomplete modernization” rather than Japanese modernity per se.<sup>63</sup> He turns to the model of Russia, which reverses the Japanese path to modernity by “shedding Europe” and “turning toward Asia,” and examines the effect of the Russian Revolution of 1917 upon the Chinese Revolution by calling attention to its underlying logic of combining national self-determination with socialist internationalism. In going over different accounts of Asia, Wang offers a dialectical rereading of Asia in which “the idea is at once colonialist and anticolonial, conservative and revolutionary, nationalist and internationalist, originating in Europe and, alternately, reshaping Europe’s image of itself.”<sup>64</sup> He closes by suggesting that reconsidering Asian history become “an effort to rethink nineteenth-century European ‘world history’” as well as a gesture to “break free of the twenty-first-century ‘new imperial’ order and its associated logic.”<sup>65</sup> What Wang articulates here is not only a critique

of colonialism and imperialism in the nineteenth century but also an imperative to extend such critical insights to the current US-centered global order.

While Kuan-Hsing Chen's work is theoretically embedded in Western cultural studies and South Asian postcolonial studies, Wang Hui represents a new effort of the Chinese Left, which tries to reconnect to Marxist materialism and dialecticism after the turn of socialism with the so-called Chinese characteristics, which David Harvey critiques as neoliberalist in nature, but which Giovanni Arrighi celebrates as neoclassic in the Adam Smith's sense of the word.<sup>66</sup> There is another tradition in theorizing the Asia Pacific in terms of diasporic Chinese movements in Southeast Asia, which Aihwa Ong and Donald M. Nonini articulate as an "ungrounded empire," involving a new "cultural politics of diaspora and transnationalism"<sup>67</sup> and reinventing "Chinese transnationalism as an alternative modernity."<sup>68</sup>

### Island Ontology, Indigenous Epistemology, and Transpacific American Studies

If decolonization in the Asia Pacific involves reconceptualization of identity and history for both the colonizer and the colonized, then the same process in the Pacific Islands points directly to indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. In her critical work, *Routes and Roots*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey engages Stoler's sense of politics of comparison by examining the oceanic archives of the Spanish, British, and American empires on the one hand, and also by rereading Caribbean and Pacific Island literatures together as coalitional responses to colonialism and imperialism, which would break new ground in both transoceanic studies and postcolonial studies on the other hand. Invoking Kamau Brathwaite's concept of "tidalectics," she seeks to foreground how "a dynamic model of geography can elucidate island history and cultural production" and then explores the specific ways in which the complex relationships between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, and routes and roots were entangled and unfolded.<sup>69</sup> She documents how the European sea powers including Japan sought remote islands to discourage the epistemological susceptibility of Europeans, distant islands to minimize the islanders' defense against Western diseases, and isolated islands to ensure colonial military superiority. She also explores how Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean was predestined "in a collapse of time-space between Antillian and Asian islands," which in cartographical representation would erase the Americas so that the Atlantic Ocean could merge with the Pacific.<sup>70</sup> To her, "Island topographies, labor, and resources have not only materially benefitted Europe (such as sugar plantations), but have provided the botanical, anthropological, biological, environmental, and ideological space for European laboratories, experiment, and development."<sup>71</sup> By focusing on the cultural production of "peoples of the sea" in both the Caribbean and the Pacific, DeLoughrey calls for a new vision of deterritorialism, which would spatially reconfigure diaspora, indigenous, and postcolonial studies.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, Kanak Chief Jean-Philippe Tjibaou employs “tales of generations of Tongans, Fijians, Samoans, and Kanak in struggle against each other” as evidence of long histories of acknowledging and challenging claims to islands.<sup>73</sup> Tjibaou’s father, Jean-Marie Tjibaou, famously lectured the French colonizers on the forgotten Kanak history and culture and celebrated them in 1975 by organizing Melanesia 2000, “an Oceanic festival of music, art, and cultural heritage.” He and his collaborators envisioned these activities as predating “the millennial imperatives of the Western calendar.”<sup>74</sup> It is on this basis that Matsuda conceives the Pacific Islands as being constituted by island communities, situated in geographies of land and sea, as well as imagined by spoken, danced, cared, and moving yet deeply localized navigational expressions.<sup>75</sup>

Pacific Islanders have never stopped challenging the Western appropriation of the islands as isolation and irrelevancy. In 1976, Samoan writer Albert Wendt introduced the idea of a shift in perspective “towards a new Oceania”; and in 1993, the late Tongan writer Epeli Hau’ofa called for a similar switch from “viewing the Pacific as ‘islands in the far sea’ [to seeing it] as ‘a sea of islands.’”<sup>76</sup> Hau’ofa begins by describing how Oceania operates at two different levels, one of “national governments and regional and international diplomacy, in which the present and future of Pacific island states and territories are planned and decided on,” and the other of “ordinary people, peasants and proletarians,” who “plan and make decisions about their lives independently, sometimes with surprising and dramatic results that go unnoticed or ignored at the top.”<sup>77</sup>

Hau’ofa traces the history of colonialism, in which Polynesia and Micronesia are both undermined as “too small, too poorly endowed with resources, and too isolated from the centers of economic growth for their inhabitants ever to be able to rise above their present condition of dependence on the largesse of wealthy nations.”<sup>78</sup> Such belittlement, he argues, can be internalized for long and transmitted across generations and in that sense may lead to moral paralysis and fatalism which were manifested in both the Indian reservations in the continental United States and the internment camps of the Japanese Americans during World War II. In that sense, Pacific Islanders have been confined to both physical and mental reservations.

Hau’ofa recalls the history and culture of Oceania that comprise of the myths, legends, oral traditions, and cosmologies, which not only designate land surfaces and surrounding ocean insofar as people can traverse and explore them, but also encompass “the underworld with its fire-controlling and earth-shaking denizens” and the heavens above with their hierarchies of powerful gods and named stars and constellations guiding people’s ways across the seas.<sup>79</sup> He identifies oceanic cultures with a critical border consciousness anchored in long histories of inter-island mobility and draws attention to “the contemporary process of what may be called world enlargement that is carried out by tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific Islanders right across the ocean—from east to west and north to south, under the very noses of academic and consultancy experts, bureaucratic planners and their

advisers, and customs and immigration officials—making nonsense of all national and economic boundaries.”<sup>80</sup> Such practices, Hau’ofa notes further, reach back to the “days when boundaries were not imaginary lines in the ocean, but rather points of entry that were constantly negotiated and even contested.”<sup>81</sup>

In another groundbreaking essay, “The Oceania in Us,” Hau’ofa suggests the possibility of developing “a substantial regional identity that is anchored in our common inheritance of a very considerable portion of Earth’s largest body of water, the Pacific Ocean.”<sup>82</sup> Such a new sense of the region should be based on “our own creation” and “our perceptions of our realities,” which are necessary for “our survival in the dawning era.”<sup>83</sup> In this vein, he turns “the ocean in us” into a new kind of ontology and epistemology, which would decenter what Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova call the “modern foundation of knowledge.”<sup>84</sup> This new sense of ontology and epistemology de-privileges the European Renaissance as the point of reference of modernity and challenges its two complementary moves that interpret the historical present, one along the colonization of time and the invention of the Middle Age, while the other through the colonization of space and the invention of the Americas. The significance of Hau’ofa’s articulation can be best captured in terms of what Mignolo and Tlostanova theorize as “critical border thinking”:

Why do we need border thinking? Where is it taking us? To the de-colonial shift as a fracture of the epistemology of the zero point. Border thinking brings to the foreground different kinds of theoretical actors and principles of knowledge that displace European modernity (which articulated the very concept of theory in the social sciences and the humanities) and empower those who have been epistemically disempowered by the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge. The decolonial epistemic shift is no longer grounded in Greek and Latin categories of thought that informed modern epistemology (since the Renaissance) in the six European languages (Italian, Spanish and Portuguese for the Renaissance; French, English and German for the Enlightenment), but in the epistemic borders between European imperial categories and languages and categories that modern epistemology ruled out as epistemologically non-sustainable . . . Border thinking is the epistemology of the future, without which another world will be impossible.<sup>85</sup>

It is precisely through the oceanic archives, old and new, colonial and de-colonial, that indigenous ontologies and epistemologies can be reinvented and reimagined. It is through this critical border thinking that transpacific American studies should be grounded and theorized.

### **Reading Oceanic Archives in the Transnational Space: Ocean History, Spanish Manila, and the World Geography of Faith in the Early United States**

The first three chapters in the volume not only rediscover the early oceanic archives but also remap transpacific movements in different directions and moments,

marking a paradigm shift from the Atlantic to the Pacific, reclaiming spaces from Southeast Asia to the Americas, and intervening in the American civilizing mission from North America to East Asia. James R. Fichter's chapter, "American and International Whaling, c.1770–1820: Toward an Ocean History," examines the unique space of the South Seas, where the Southern Atlantic, the Indian, and the Pacific Oceans meet, and foregrounds three archives largely unconsulted in global whaling history—the Saint Helena Archive, the Cape Town Archive Repository, and the Brazilian Arquivo Nacional. He argues that the American whaling narrative should be interpreted as transnational and global rather than national from the outset and its ecological and economic consequences should be explored in terms of Western capitalist expansion and competition.

In "Spanish Manila: A Transpacific Maritime Enterprise and America's First Chinatown," Evelyn Hu-DeHart develops a Chinese/East Asian version of the transpacific by investigating how the Minnan (southern Fujian in Chinese) traders linked the old and vast Indian Ocean world to the Spanish Pacific and made the Manila Galleon trade the first completely global commercial enterprise. In response to the master narrative of the American Pacific, she offers an alternative transpacific story, which emphasizes the Chinese and other Asians crossing the vast ocean to Mexico and Peru and creating new spaces and formations as slaves, artisans, merchants, travelers, religious pilgrims, and family members.

Kendall Johnson's chapter, "Residing in 'South-Eastern Asia' of the Antebellum United States," presents a case study of the American "civilizing mission" in the early nineteenth century. Reading Reverend David Abeel's (1804–1846) missionary dedication to speak, read, write, and print in languages other than English in terms of transoceanic imaginary, Johnson examines the two directions of the resulting print circuit—outward to the unconverted and inward back home to the churchgoing Christians of the early United States. He concludes that Abeel's evangelical geography did not necessarily convert the Chinese into Christians but enabled the Mandarins such as Xu Jiyu to embrace the missionary's sense of geography and interpret the strategic power of commerce in a new light.

### **Oceanic Archives and the Transterritorial Turn in American Studies: Constituting the "Public," Genealogizing Colonial and Indigenous Translations**

In this section, the three chapters engage "the transterritorial turn in American studies" by interrogating the colonial archives and reinventing indigenous ontologies and epistemologies. In "'Thank God for the Maladjusted': The Transterritorial Turn towards the Chamorro Poetry of Guahan (Guam)," Craig Santos Perez examines the US territories outside the national borders and develops a new conceptual framework, which views America from the discontinuous territories of the empire and questions the exceptionalist narratives of American freedom, liberation, and



democracy. Perez reads the poetry of Guam as a way for the Chamorro to articulate their cultural pride against US colonialism and imperialism.

In “Land, History, and the Law: Constituting the ‘Public’ through Environmentalism and Annexation,” Susan Y. Najita builds her argument around Hau‘ofa’ vision of Oceania and elaborates the intimate and genealogical relationship between land and water. By investigating the significance of place for the Hawaiian monarchy and establishment of the national park against US colonialism, Najita highlights both the legal and ethical foundations for conservation and environmental stewardship in contemporary Hawai‘i.

Drawing on recent scholarship in translation studies, indigenous studies, and Hawaiian studies, Brandy Nālani McDougall investigates the English translations of the Kumulipo by Queen Lili‘uokalani, Martha Beckwith, and Rubellite Kawena Johnston, as well as the historical contexts of their publication. She questions the continuing distortion of the indigenous claims to sovereignty in the neocolonial production and dissemination of knowledge and highlights the enduring power of the Kumulipo figures in the consciousness of contemporary Kanaka Maoli writers and performers from a US-occupied Hawai‘i.

### **Remapping Transpacific Studies: Oceanic Archives of Imperialism/s, Transpacific Imagination, and Memories of Murder**

The chapters in this section explore different oceanic archives and develop competing visions and forms of the transpacific. Tomoko Akami’s “The Ocean as a Medium for Interimperial Collaboration: Scientists’ Networks across and in the Pacific Ocean in the 1920s” examines the two US-led nongovernmental, multinational institutions—the Institute of Pacific Relations (1925–1960) and the Pan Pacific Science Congress (1920–present). She argues that the two institutions envisioned the Pacific as an open space rather than closed seas and thus facilitated a vision of “inter-imperialism” rather than an anti-imperialist internationalism popular in the 1920s and 1930s. Akami suggests that these power dynamics at the metropolitan centers offshore continue to impact the lives of people in Oceania.

In his chapter, “Maxine Hong Kingston’s Transpacific Imagination: From the Talk Story of the ‘No-Name Woman’ to the Articulation of Peace,” Yuan Shu argues that Kingston has moved away from the narrative role as a native informant in her early work and presented a new multicultural United States by reinventing a Chinese American epistemology and by intervening in US neo-imperialism around the globe, particularly in Iraq. Her efforts at pacifism substantiate what Walter Mignolo calls “decolonial thinking,” a critical gesture that reclaims non-Western humanity, revalidates indigenous ontology and epistemology, and legitimates third world knowledge production and dissemination.

Viet Thanh Nguyen’s chapter, “Memories of Murder: The Other Korean War (in Viet Nam),” invokes “oceanic archives” provocatively in terms of “the vast archives of

the dead” and offers a new perspective on the American War in Vietnam. Defining “oceanic archives” as “the weight of the lost and of the loss felt locally and across oceans,” he not only explores the space between the United States and elsewhere but also the space between South Korea and its own elsewhere. To Nguyen, the controversy about the other Korean War in Vietnam derives from “how that war has been ineluctably intertwined with the Korean economy, with Korean politics, and with Korean visions of how Korea positions itself vis-à-vis its veterans, its citizens, the United States, the Cold War, the global market, and other Asian countries including Viet Nam, all within the context of a regional and global order dominated by US power and interests.” Nguyen concludes by emphasizing how both the United States and South Korea manufacture and distribute their own memories about wars “across different seas to Viet Nam.”

### **Revisiting Oceanic Archives, Rethinking Transnational American Studies: Next Steps, Oceanic Communities, and Transpacific Eco-poetics**

The last three chapters speculate upon new directions in which transpacific American studies may move. In her chapter, “Transnational American Studies: Next Steps?” Shelley Fisher Fishkin challenges American studies scholars to use non-US archives and to engage materials in languages other than English in their critiques of American exceptionalism. In that regard, she proposes transnational, multilingual, collaborative, digital research projects as a way to explore topics that are virtually impossible for works of monolingual, solo scholarship to address. In using the specific example of “the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project” at Stanford, which she and Gordon Chang initiated in 2012, Fishkin suggests that we learn lessons about the challenges and rewards of pursuing this kind of project—made possible by digital technology—which may point to the future of transnational American studies.

Otto Heim’s chapter, “Recalling Oceanic Communities: The Transnational Theater of John Kneubuhl and Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl,” not only builds its argument on Epeli Hau’ofa’s vision of “our sea of islands” and “the ocean in us” but also articulates Oceanic experiences and projections of space in terms of community consciousness beyond the national framework and different from global experiences. Reading the plays of John and Victoria Kneubuhl with a focus on the meaning of loss and the work of memory, Heim explores the role of genealogy in the formation of Oceanic communities, which weave together diverse and conflicting viewpoints in a common acknowledgement of an unseen life of the past in the present.

In the last but not the least chapter in the volume, “Oceania as Peril and Promise: Towards Theorizing a Worlded Vision of Transpacific Eco-poetics,” Rob Wilson not only examines the increasing tension in the South China Sea as “Asia’s Roiling Sea” but also raises the serious issue of how to reframe the ocean in terms that would

“elicit consent and inspire an imagination of co-belonging, mutual interest, and eco-poetic care.” For ocean to signify “a bioregional site of coalitional *promise*” rather than “a geopolitical danger zone of antagonistic *peril*,” Wilson argues for a new perception of ourselves as oceanic citizens as much as earth-dwellers connected in a Gaia-like wholeness and invokes such authors of oceanic eco-poetics, from Gary Snyder and Epeli Hau’ofa to Craig Santos-Perez and Juliana Spahr, as a means to disrupt the environmental unconsciousness and historical amnesia reigning across the Pacific. Wilson articulates a future of the ocean that would figure in a more worlded vision of planetary totality set at the core of a transnationalized cultural studies de-mapping as well as remapping the oceanic entanglements.

## Notes

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7. Ann Laura Stoler, “Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen,” in *Haunted by Empire*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 1–22.
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9. Arif Dirlik, ed., *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, 2nd ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).
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11. Walter D. Mignolo, "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 81.
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15. J. M. Cohen, introduction to *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, ed. and trans. J. M. Cohen (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 11–24.
16. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989).
17. Ronald Takaki, *Iron Cages: Race and Culture in 19th-Century America*, revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 229.
18. Takaki, *Iron Cages*, 229.
19. Richard Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 271.
20. Drinnon, *Facing West*, 271,
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22. Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 3.
23. Takaki, *Strangers*, 28.
24. Yung Wing, *My Life in China and America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1909), 195.
25. Shih-shan H. Ts'ai, "Chinese Immigration through Communist Chinese Eyes: An Introduction to the Historiography," *Pacific Historical Review* 43, no. 3 (August 1974): 395–408. Ts'ai, a historian based at the University of Arkansas, offered an assessment of the work of Zhu and Qing on p. 408: "Chu Shih-chia's (Zhu Shijia) two books of selected archival materials are among the most important Sino-American historical documents prepared by any Chinese. Ch'ing Ju-chi's (Qing Ruji) lengthy work must also be ranked as a leading Sino-American diplomatic history in the Chinese language."
26. With a PhD in history from Columbia University and extensive research experiences in archives, museums, and libraries in both China and the United States, Zhu obtained a position in the Asiatic Division of Library of Congress in October 1939, and scrutinized all the available Chinese language material in the archives during his tenure there. He copied over 1000 entries of US-China diplomatic exchanges and memorials and donated them all to the Chinese National Archives upon his return to China in 1950, at the invitation of Chen Hanseng, a prominent historian at Peking University, and after his resignation as an associate professor of history at the University of Washington in Seattle.
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28. Zhu, *Historical Documents*, 22–23. Cf. "Chinese Coolie Trade," H. Executive Document 87, 36 Congress, 1 session (1860), serial 1057. 29. Accessed May 18, 2016. [https://archive.org/stream/unitedstatescon128offigoog/unitedstatescon128offigoog\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/unitedstatescon128offigoog/unitedstatescon128offigoog_djvu.txt).

29. A Yin, *A Literary Anthology on Resistance to the U.S. Exclusion of Chinese Laborers* [Fanmei huagon jinyuewenxueji], Vol. 5 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960). This was part of his book series on *Literary Anthologies of Modern China's Resistance to Foreign Aggressions* [Zhongguo jindai fanqinluewenxueji], which features the themes of the two Opium Wars with Britain, the Sino-French War, the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894, the Boxing Rebellion, as well as the Exclusion of the Chinese in the United States. Because Chinese historians could not find any detail or description of the actual situation of the transpacific coolie trade, they often resorted to literature and quoted specifically from A Yin's volume, which collects in full length the novel, *Bitter Society*, based on the oral history of a few surviving laborers as stated in the book's preface. He started working on the collection in Shanghai in the midst of the savage bombing and fighting of the Japanese invasion in 1937 and expanded it at the Sun Yat-sen Library of Guangdong Province in Guangzhou in the late 1950s.

This volume collects an array of poems, plays, novels, and travel writing on the conditions and experiences of Chinese laborers coming to North America and Latin America but frames these texts in light of the spirit of the Bandung Conference of 1955, which had represented a transnational and global coalition of the Third World anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist movements.

30. A Yin, *A Literary Anthology*, 11–14.
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34. Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Politics* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1900).
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44. DeLoughrey, “The Myth,” 171.

45. See Pekka Korhonen, "The Pacific Age in World History," *Journal of World History* 7, no. 1 (1996): 41–71. See also Bruce Cumings, "Rimspeak; or, the Discourse of the 'Pacific Rim,'" and "The Northeast Asian Political Economy," *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, 2nd ed., ed. Arif Dirlik (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 53–72, 99–141.
46. Korhonen, "The Pacific Age in World History," *Journal of World History* 7, no. 1 (1996): 41–71, 48.
47. Korhonen, "The Pacific Age," 48.
48. Korhonen, "The Pacific Age," 61.
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51. Bruce Cumings, "Rimspeak; or, the Discourse of the 'Pacific Rim,'" *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea*, 2nd ed., ed. Arif Dirlik (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 53–72.
52. Cumings, "Rimspeak," 63.
53. Cumings, "Rimspeak," 63.
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