



Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field (Intersections: Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies)

Janet Hoskins

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The Pacific has long been a space of conquest, exploration, fantasy, and resistance. Pacific Islanders had established civilizations and cultures of travel well before European explorers arrived, initiating centuries of upheaval and transformation. The twentieth century, with its various wars fought in and over the Pacific, is only the most recent era to witness military strife and economic competition. While “Asia Pacific” and “Pacific Rim” were late twentieth-century terms that dealt with the importance of the Pacific to the economic, political, and cultural arrangements that span Asia and the Americas, a new term has arisen—the transpacific. In the twenty-first century, U.S. efforts to dominate the ocean are symbolized not only in the “Pacific pivot” of American policy but also the development of a Transpacific Partnership. This partnership brings together a dozen countries—not including China—in a trade pact whose aim is to cement U.S. influence. That pact signals how the transpacific, up to now an academic term, has reached mass consciousness.

Recognizing the increasing importance of the transpacific as a word and concept, this anthology proposes a framework for transpacific studies that examines the flows of culture, capital, ideas, and labor across the Pacific. These flows involve Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific Islands. The introduction to the anthology by its editors, Janet Hoskins and Viet Thanh Nguyen, consider the advantages and limitations of models found in Asian studies, American studies, and Asian American studies for dealing with these flows. The editors argue that transpacific studies can draw from all three in order to provide a critical model for considering the geopolitical struggle over the Pacific, with its attendant possibilities for inequality and exploitation. Transpacific studies also sheds light on the cultural and political movements, artistic works, and ideas that have arisen to contest state, corporate, and military ambitions. In sum, the transpacific as a concept illuminates how flows across the Pacific can be harnessed for purposes of both domination and resistance.

The anthology’s contributors include geographers (Brenda S. A. Yeoh, Weiqiang Lin), sociologists (Yen Le Espiritu, Hung Cam Thai), literary critics (John Carlos Rowe, J. Francisco Benitez, Yunte Huang, Viet Thanh Nguyen), and anthropologists (Xiang Biao, Heonik Kwon, Nancy Lutkehaus, Janet Hoskins), as well as a historian (Laurie J. Sears), and a film scholar (Akira Lippit). Together these contributors demonstrate how a transpacific model can be deployed across multiple disciplines and from varied locations, with scholars working from the United States, Singapore, Japan and England. Topics include the Cold War, the Chinese state, U.S. imperialism, diasporic and refugee cultures and economies, national cinemas, transpacific art, and the view of the transpacific from Asia. These varied topics are a result of the anthology’s purpose in bringing scholars into conversation and illuminating how location influences the perception of the transpacific. But regardless of the individual view, what the essays gathered here collectively demonstrate is the energy, excitement, and insight that can be generated from within a transpacific framework.

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