

Book Reviews

Transnational Japan as History: Empire, Migration, and Social Movements

By Pedro IACOBELLI, Danton LEARY and Shinnosuke TAKAHASHI

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Is transnational history a useful approach to historical problems? To many readers this sentence may sound like a question from the past millennium but, in fact, it is posed in the introduction of the edited volume under review, a recent addition to Palgrave Macmillan's Transnational History Series. Unsurprisingly, the editors strongly emphasize the advantages of the transnational approach in general and of studying Japan from a *transnational* rather than *national* or "self-centered" (p. 7) perspective in particular. Of course, this argument is neither entirely new nor does it seem to have come under attack recently. On the contrary, as the series editors Akira Iriye and Rana Mitter affirm in their brief foreword, the boom in global (or world) history has actually added further value and credibility to transnational history because it "provide[s] a fresh way of looking at the world's past

and present” by studying “the global community” (p. xi). The editors, however, also argue for a (superior) place for transnational history as opposed to global or world history. To this end, unfortunately, Iacobelli, Leary, and Takahashi define global history as focusing “on unidirectional activity, on the homogenization of the world”. By contrast, they define transnational history as preferring “movements, flows and circulations that transcended politically bounded territories” (p. 6). As practitioners of global history, among them many readers of this journal, will know, the latter is not a difference between both methods but a commonality. Surely transnational history is not always the same as global history. One major difference seems to be the study between geographically distant places (in global history) while transnational history is often concerned with less distant, often neighboring countries, as is the case in most chapters of this book. Leaving conceptual and definitional problems aside, this edited volume contains many case studies that do in fact make strong cases for transnational history, particularly if understood as preferring a focus on civil society actors rather than on the political elite.

The book is divided into the three thematic sections of empire, migration, and social movements. In the first section, Asano offers a new reading of different options of Japanese colonial policy towards Korea, Kishida studies pan-Asianist writers at Manchuria’s Kenkoku University in the 1930s and 1940s, and Muminov analyzes the issue of Japanese prisoners of war in Siberia in the immediate post-war decade. Asano argues that Japan’s annexation of Korea was not a strategic goal of imperial policy but “an outcome of the failure of Japan’s protectorate policies,” namely to implement a confederalist alternative that could have created a transnational rather than imperial-colonial

space. Kishida studies the transnational micro-cosmos of Kenkoku University (1937-45) where Japanese, Koreans, Chinese and scholars from other countries worked together in what Kishida calls a “perhaps uniquely open” academic culture (p. 62).

The second section contains case studies of migration and migrant communities in Karafuto (Morris-Suzuki) and Singapore (Mihalopoulos) as well as of the activities of the Christian Japanese Striving Association (Hoshino). Focusing on the social impact of migration on the village of Toyohara which had become Karafuto’s capital city in 1908, Morris-Suzuki demonstrates that much less of the migration there than propagated and theorized was done in the spirit of pioneering settlement from Japan. Instead, many migrants were temporary contract labourers from China. Hoshino’s chapter on the Japanese Christian organization *Nihon Rikkōkai* focuses on writings and activities by Nagata Shigeshi (1881-1973), its second president. Hoshino studies how Nagata, himself a migrant to the US in 1908, struggled to formulate his own policy in the socio-political context of the time. First shifting the attention from North to South America and then to Manchuria and other parts of Japan’s empire, his commitment to promoting migration more often than not seemed to have been in line with Japan’s assumed imperial mission to bring “cultivation and enlightenment of the colonized population and native islanders” (p. 137).

“Social movements” in the third section are studied with a stronger focus on postwar Japan (Saruya on the antinuclear bomb movement, Dietz on Okinawan anti-base activism) but also include a study of the Japanese Esperanto movement in the first

decades of the twentieth centuries by Rapley. His chapter analyzes how that movement – with Tokyo as its centre – facilitated “transnational encounters,” both physically and intellectually. Although the chapter’s title suggests otherwise, Esperanto does not seem to have been discussed as “a language for Asia.” Instead, key promoters of the movement in Japan, such as Kuroita Katsumi, Futabatei Shimei, and Ōsugi Sakae appear to have been drawn into the Esperanto movement because of their socialist, not Asianist, inclinations.

Transnational Japan as History is a significant collection of essays on topics of which many are so important and still unexplored that book-length studies of them would be very welcome.