

Asia Inside Out: Changing Times.

Edited by Eric Tagliacozzo, Helen F. Siu and Peter C. Perdue. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. Pp. 336. ISBN 10: 0674598504; ISBN 13: 978-0674598508.

Reviewed by Michael Facius, Freie Universität Berlin

E-mail michael.facius@fu-berlin.de

doi:10.1017/S1479591415000236

Where and when was “Asian globalization,” and how has it shaped the region today? The dust jacket of the present volume promises to deliver answers to this question by unfurling before its readers the “diverse networks and dynamic developments that have linked people from Japan to Yemen.” The editors take their cue from David Wyatt’s article “Southeast Asia ‘inside out’” and build on the influential critiques by Willem van Schendel, Lewis Martin and Kären Wigen on the limitations of canonical regional labels such as of East, South or Southeast Asia.¹ To further our understanding of cross-border flows and networks, they conjure the heuristic value of a loosely defined Asian macro-region. Flows of goods, ideas and people spring up, run dry and change direction at certain points in time, and it is precisely such turning points or “changing times,” as the subtitle has it, that take center stage here.

The front matter gives a first impression of the rhythms of Asian globalization as imagined by this collection: all chapter titles are organized around specific years at specific places, from 1501 in Tabriz to 2008 in Dubai, while a map visualizes all localities discussed in the contributions, roughly a trapezoid with Mocha, Tabriz, Shizuoka and Jakarta at the vertices. Photographs of a “historical Chinese fishing net” and the Infosys building in Bangalore symbolizing “India’s IT future,” scattered throughout the introductory chapter, are suggestive of deep-rooted historical and spatial ties across the region.

An experimental design such as this raises all kinds of fascinating questions. Consider, for example, the long tradition of critical thought regarding the term Asia, its entanglements with Western imperialism and its doubtful use for political projects and thus of its problematic nature as an analytic concept.² This tradition feeds into an ongoing conversation about the disciplinary history and future of area studies and the kind of knowledge it produces.³ That we still need “regional studies done by scholars versed in the particularities of a space and tradition” (p. 6) is beyond dispute. But whether “Asia” can and should continue to be the foundation on which to organize research is an altogether different question, and some voices are now arguing for a remodeling and incorporation of area studies into a new practice of “global studies.”⁴

Adding the historical depth of five hundred years and the weight of globalization and trans-cultural flows to the mix further complicates the analysis. It is no secret that “Asia” only became a meaningful concept to actors in the region during the nineteenth century. It was and remains highly

-
- 1 David K. Wyatt, “Southeast Asia ‘Inside Out,’ 1300–1800: A Perspective from the Interior,” *Modern Asian Studies* 31:3 (1997), pp. 689–709; Martin W. Lewis and Kären E. Wigen, *The Myth of Continents. A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Willem van Schendel, “Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20 (2002), pp. 647–68.
 - 2 See, among many others, Naoki Sakai, “‘You Asians’: On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 99:4 (2000), pp. 789–817. For a more optimistic view about the political value of “Asia” see Kuan-Hsing Chen, *Asia as Method. Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).
 - 3 See, e.g., Masao Miyoshi and Harry Harootunian, eds., *Learning Places. The Afterlife of Area Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).
 - 4 John Lie, “Asian Studies/Global Studies: Transcending Area Studies and Social Sciences,” *Cross-Currents. East Asian History and Culture Review* 2 (2012), <https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/e-journal/issue-2/>.

contentious and often connected to political visions and programs such as Pan-Asianism.⁵ This is reflected in Ananda Yang's chapter, which presents the case of Thakur Gadadhar Singh, a "subaltern" Indian soldier who traveled to China in 1900 as a member of the British intervention force sent to quell the Boxer Rebellion. Through a reading of his self-published travel memoir "Thirteen Months in China," Yang shows how Singh developed a pan-Asian consciousness, a "sense of kinship" (p. 223) with China in the face of the Western aggression he himself was mobilized to support.

Apart from Yang's piece, there is only one additional chapter in which the macro-region Asia plays a central role, if not as an actors' category, then as an analytical perspective. Carrying forward the work of his magnum opus "Strange Parallels," Victor Lieberman even transcends the already vast geographical limits of the volume and opts for the designation "Eurasia" in his chapter on imperial revivals around 1555.⁶ He compares four political formations – that of Burma, Russia, India and Japan – to identify common patterns, in this case one of synchronized "early modern integration" (p. 74). This integration was spurred by ideals of political unity that survived a period of fragmentation, military reforms and competition, increasing resource extraction and economic expansion as well as cultural circulation.⁷ With its sweeping generalizations and proclamation of "universal" (p. 85) forces, the chapter ironically seems to undermine any claim to a specifically Asian experience.

The remaining chapters focus on more circumscribed places and areas. In some respects, a sense of the tides of "Asian globalization" can be gained by reading them collectively. Yet, the example of Chinese diasporic communities around the world, brought up and quickly set aside by the editors (p. 3), points to the difficulties of defining the "inside" of Asia at all. Imagining a region as a unified, contiguous, and ultimately self-contained spatial plane appears increasingly problematic due to the work of scholars who have studied trans-cultural entanglements and global flows. As a consequence of this work, some of them now call for the historicization of "regimes of territorialization" and opt instead for more dynamic spatial configurations.⁸

That connections to faraway places can exert a greater influence on a locale than those nominally inside the same region appears self-evident when we consider contemporary globalization. Naomi Hosoda's anthropological study on Filipino migrant workers in Dubai opens an intriguing window into their daily lives, networks and sorrows, in particular their reactions to the emirate's tightening of immigration laws in 2008. Her chapter makes it clear that all players, even while acting in an "Asian" setting, truly are embedded in a globalized economy: the TV channels in the Philippines that scour the world for "open cities" amenable to Filipino migration; the Filipino workers, for many of whom Dubai was exchangeable with any "place where overseas jobs were available" (p. 286); and the emirate government, which reacted to an uncontrolled inflow of migrant workers based on the clever use of visit visas.

Peter Perdue makes a strong case for influential connections across but also beyond various parts of Asia more than four centuries earlier in his article on 1557, "a year of some significance" for Ming foreign relations. He identifies the opening of the silver mine in Potosi and the grant of a leasehold to the Portuguese in Macau as factors that were just as important for the transformation of China's

5 See Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman, eds., *Pan-Asianism. A Documentary History*, 2 vols. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012).

6 Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels. Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003–9).

7 This revival has been explained by John Darwin in a similarly broad Eurasian perspective as the effect of an imperial pull following the breakup of the Timurid empire. See John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

8 Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann, "Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the Impact of Area Studies to the Study of Critical Junctures of Globalization," *Journal of Global History* 5 (2010), pp. 149–70, here pp. 164f.

links to the world in the latter half of the sixteenth century as the surrender of a *wakou* pirate chief based in the Japanese archipelago and the settlement with a Mongol federation under Altan Khan in the north.

His findings chime in with many other studies published in recent decades that argue for the emergence of a “first global economy” (p. 107) and more generally for the “dawn of a global world” around 1600.⁹ The volume as a whole seems to support this periodization. Even if a chapter on, say, Afshana in 980 – the location and date of Ibn Sina’s birth – could be added to the line-up without changing the main thrust of the argument, where it does begin is in Tabriz in 1501, and many of the authors invoke the “early modern” period as a frame of reference.¹⁰ This reflects a growing interest in the period in global history and might be a useful concept with which to think about Asian globalization.¹¹ Following Charles Parker’s argument in his survey of early modern global connections, the early modern world was characterized by a new quality and density of global exchange compared with earlier periods, but compared with the time after 1800 also by polycentric dynamics that prevented any one region from dominating the others.¹²

The contributors do not confine themselves to the straightjacket of global periodization schemes or single-year titles, however, and surprise readers with ingenious approaches to the temporalities of their subjects. Delimiting chapters by significant dates comes most naturally to studies that utilize the quantifiable data of economic history. Robert Hellyer gives an overview of the Japanese tea trade that developed after the opening of Japanese ports, focusing on 1874, a year when trading volumes peaked. He explains the background of the rising production and export levels and underlines the importance of Chinese know-how and American trade policies in enabling the tea boom. Nancy Um gives a parallel account of Yemen between 1636 and 1726, when the region dominated the world coffee trade. She presents three “coffee stories” (p. 116) that relate to the history of the plant, the bean as a commodity, and the drink and its consumption, and describes how the Ottomans and the Dutch competed for participation in the lucrative trade before it was displaced by European cultivation in Batavia and Martinique. Both Hellyer and Um stress the cross-cultural networks of production, marketing and consumption that shaped the local conditions in Mocha and Yokohama.

Heidi Walcher tries a very different avenue in her chapter about Tabriz in 1501. She switches lenses several times to “anatomize the relevance” (p. 35) of the Safavid conquest of the city in all kinds of spatial and temporal configurations. Depending on whether we look at trade routes or political hegemonies, whether we focus on northern Iran in Ismail’s lifetime or the three “Islamic empires” throughout the early modern period, the conquest ceases to be the decisive event that it often is represented to be in conventional accounts of Iranian or Persian history and turns into a somewhat more elusive but helpful device in understanding Iran’s internal regional logics as well its place in the history of central Asia, “Islamic civilization,” and Eurasian trade and cultural exchange.¹³

9 Timothy Brook, *Vermeer’s Hat. The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (London: Profile Books, 2008).

10 S. Frederick Starr, *Lost Enlightenment. Central Asia’s Golden Age from the Arab Conquest to Tamerlane* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013) makes a forceful case for the inclusion of Central Asia around 1000 into any narratives about Asian globalization.

11 See, e.g., David Porter, ed., *Comparative Early Modernities, 1100–1800* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) or R. Bin Wong, “Regions and Global History,” in *Writing the History of the Global*, ed. Maxine Berg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 83–105.

12 Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 3.

13 On early modern Iran and its regional constellations see also the recent edited volume Willem Floor and Edmund Herzig, eds., *Iran and the World in the Safavid Age* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012).

In contrast to Walcher, Eric Tagliacozzo purposefully limits the range of sight of his chapter on the Dutch East Indies to the years leading up to 1910, the highpoint of imperial rule and a period of “colonial optimism” (p. 243). Everything, as Tagliacozzo shows in vivid detail, proceeded to the liking and pride of the colonial government: the colony was pacified, better known, taxed more effectively, and ruled more tightly than ever before – and apparently with little grounds for sorrow. This “tree ring approach” (p. 226) produces an insightful snapshot of the Dutch East Indies at one specific point in time. Yet, the strength of reduced visibility comes at a price. Apart from ominous hints at colonial “gangrene” and “disasters [...] just around the bend” (p. 226), the chapter provides little in terms of contextualizing the developments to come. Thus it remains open to discussion to what extent the end of the Dutch Indies was an outcome of Dutch complacency and not of the general aporias of modern colonialism or of external factors such as the global depression or the Japanese war of “liberation.”

In her contribution on ebbs and flows in the Indian Ocean, Kerry Ward further steps up the deconstruction of conventional chronology. The important rhythms here, she claims, are not man-made, but created by monsoon winds, weather patterns and the ever-changing nature of the ocean itself. The nominal year is 1745, but Ward admits it is “not a ‘turning point’” (p. 165), but more of a placeholder that anchors narratives of people who traversed the sea and lived with or off it, from a Tamil merchant to Malay Muslim scholars and a Malagasy princess. The chapter resonates closely with other innovative conceptual and narrative attempts to rethink time and space from a maritime perspective such as Matt Matsuda’s “Pacific Worlds” or Philip Steinberg’s and Kimberley Peters’ meditation on “liquid ontologies.”¹⁴

Throughout and between the chapters, other powerful and often man-made long-term patterns and continuities flash up, for instance when we read about Indian traders in eighteenth-century Yemen (p. 120) and later in twenty-first-century Dubai (pp. 294f.) or the Portuguese occupation of Hormuz in 1515 (p. 48) and their lease of Macau that only ended in 1999. To trace the history of the currents that “make up the modern Asian world” (p. 18) is in fact one of the self-professed aims of the collection, even though this is clearly subordinate and sometimes in conflict with the overall stress on synchronicity and conjunctures.

The chapter on Bangalore by Andrew Willford makes the clearest argument in this regard. Willford lays out the long history of “cosmopolitanism” (p. 274) in Bangalore and the growing Tamil-speaking population under British rule before attending to the redrawing of state boundaries in 1956 that made Bangalore the capital of the new monolingual Kannada-speaking state of Karnataka. Willford explores in detail the tensions and intermittent riots between the Kannada-speakers and the Tamil minority that ensued. In the last section, he connects the post-colonial conflict to the present through insightful ethnographic observations of the Kumaraswami festival, which is attended by both Tamils and Kannadigas and which he reads as a possible sign and source of reconciliation.

In other cases, the links between past and present remain diffuse, as in Charles Wheeler’s otherwise excellent contribution on the activities of the Vietnamese Hoang Bich (Chinese: Huangbo) Zen master Nguyen Thieu. The study, which coincides with the publication of a monograph on the Chinese Huangbo Zen monk Yinyuan, who transplanted the sect to Japan after the fall of the Ming, signifies a welcome new interest in early modern Buddhism from a trans-regional perspective.¹⁵ Like Wu, Wheeler stresses the border-crossing character and vitality of Zen. However, to substantiate drawing a direct line from Nguyen Thieu to Thich Nhat Hanh, who has been instrumental

14 Matt K. Matsuda, *Pacific Worlds. A History of Seas, Peoples, and Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters, “Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33 (2015), pp. 247–64.

15 Jiang Wu, *Leaving for the Rising Sun. Chinese Zen Master Yinyuan and the Authenticity Crisis in Early Modern East Asia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

in spreading Zen in the West since the 1960s, would have required more room than the short chapter can provide to account for intervening transformations engendered by the Vietnam War, the re-fashioning of Buddhism as a modern religion and the colonial period.

In summary, the collection as a whole appears somewhat reluctant to engage the “deep theoretical implications” (p. 18) embedded in its research agenda, but it is replete with thought-provoking case studies of conjunctures that informed Asian flows and connections throughout the last five centuries. It reveals anew the tensions of a research tradition built on the area studies framework created after the Second World War in a period of trans-regional and global studies and simultaneously the many innovative themes and approaches currently being pursued under its roof. For the first reason no less than the second, “Changing Times” will prove of great value to scholars in area studies and global history alike.

Makers of Modern Asia.

Edited by Ramachandra Guha. Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. Pp. 400.

ISBN 10: 0674365410; ISBN 13: 978-0674365414.

Reviewed by Arupjyoti Saikia, Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati

E-mail arupjyotisaikia@gmail.com

doi:10.1017/S1479591415000273

The twenty-first century has often been visualized as the ‘Asian century’. A wide variety of commentary presents the emergence of this as an offshoot of the economic growth that some of the Asian nations have successfully achieved in the second half of the twentieth century. The emergence of the Asian century also means the retreat of the existing superpower, i.e. America. The Asian nations selected by Ramachandra Guha, a very well known author and himself a superb prose writer, are home to the bulk of the world population. The makers of Asia chosen by Guha to a large extent shaped these nations and have continued to shape their destiny. Some are being re-questioned within their domestic turf. The Nehruvian framework of Indian government has come under significant pressure, but Nehru remains at the centre of the very foundation of modern India. Commentaries which foreground the economic realm of the Asian century, however, rarely discuss these nations’ history of anti-imperialism or their extraordinary effort to emerge from deep-rooted social and political settings. Guha strongly reminds us that behind the rise of the Asian century ‘lies a now somewhat obscured history of agitation and consolidation that created unified, stable ... nation-states out of fragmented territories and factious social groups’. This is particularly true of the large sections of the Indian diaspora in America who refuse to see India’s proclaimed economic strength, at least not beyond the recent years.

For *Makers of Modern Asia*, the political lives of these nations and the political and ideological journeys that their leaders adopted are equally powerful in the making of this new Asian century. Asia’s twenty-first century would not have been powerful without the eventful days of protests, ideological wars, loss of life and a big challenge to the West, which was waged before much of the birth of the Asian century was talked about. These Asian nations were under the dominance of European countries. The exception was China. Though it was not colonized, the European powers never missed any opportunity to challenge it, and the country was perpetually divided. It was after the beginning of the twentieth century that Asian nations found new confidence in their political leaders. By the middle of the century, these nations set the ball of decolonization rolling, and their colonial masters retreated, often suffering deep humiliation at the hands of their erstwhile subjects.

To unravel the untold yet powerful political dynamics that gave birth to the modern Asian nations, *Makers of Modern Asia* has neatly put together the extraordinary lives of eleven Asian leaders. The authors of these well-written essays have already studied the politics and times of these leaders and published authoritative accounts of them. Guha ensures that his choice of leaders transcended