UC Berkeley

Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review

Title

Territory and Its Discontents

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/43g2p01r

Journal

Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review, 1(29)

Author

Stolz, Robert

Publication Date

2019-03-01

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

CROSS-CURRENTS
EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

Review Essay

Territory and Its Discontents

Robert Stolz, New York University

Stolz, Robert. 2018. “Territory and Its Discontents.” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (e-journal) 29: 90–97. https://cross-currents.berkeley.edu/ejournal/issue-29/stolz.

David R. Ambaras. *Japan’s Imperial Underworlds: Intimate Encounters at the Borders of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 298 pp. $100 (cloth).

Paul D. Barclay. *Outcasts of Empire: Japan’s Rule on Taiwan’s “Savage Border,” 1874–1945.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017. 322 pp. $35 (paper)/open access (e-book).

Kate McDonald. *Placing Empire: Travel and the Social Imagination in Imperial Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017. 231 pp. $35 (paper)/open access (e-book).

The three books under consideration here continue the last ten years’ surge in research and writing on the Japanese Empire. All three eschew a focus on *tairiki rōnin* (continental adventurers) and Japanese officials in favor of focusing on citizens and national and colonial subjects and their various negotiations, subjugations, and collaborations with questions of territory, power, and subjectivity.

Japan’s Imperial Underworlds

David R. Ambaras’s *Japan’s Imperial Underworlds: Intimate Encounters at the Borders of Empire* looks at daily lives in the Japanese Empire, recounting multiple “microhistories” of ordinary peoples’ “intimate encounters”: children, interracial marriages, piracy, and other margins “only partly expressible in cartographic terms” (210). In the process, it uncovers the ad hoc, expected, unexpected, desperate, and sometimes ridiculous attempts by Japanese officialdom and media to territorialize along ethno-nationalist lines these lives lived on the mobile margins. Or, as stated in the epilogue, it is the excavation of a “set of social relations not bounded by the imperatives of territory” (209).

The initiating framework is the assertion that the opening of Japan to the West was also a reopening of Japan to the Sinosphere. But the book also refuses a simple narrative of the collapse of the Chinese Empire and the rise of the Japanese. Instead, it maintains a focus on the margins through to the epilogue's rediscovery of these issues in contemporary Japan. The reopening to the Sinosphere has been covered in other texts on Japan's empire—perhaps most notably in Stefan Tanaka's examination of the differentiation within continuity of Confucianism in *Japan's Orient* (1995). That history, and such contemporary intellectual encounters with China as Okakura Kakuzō's *The Book of Tea* (1906), were success stories for Japanese leadership of Asia. Here, however, the Sinosphere emerges as a haunting place of fear and desire that constantly threatens to absorb a Japan trying to modernize itself.

Chapter 1 focuses on the presence of Chinese in the treaty ports opened by the unequal treaties of 1858, specifically examining the trafficking of Japanese children by Chinese traders. The focus is on children and childhood as "liminal," because they were seen as "not yet firmly embedded in family networks, not yet morally and legally responsible agents, not yet necessarily conscious of their Japanese identity" (69). The China that threatens here is not the grandeur of the Middle Kingdom, but is one inflected by the discourse on a Civilized (*bunmei*) Japan against a China regarded as a "land of cannibalism and gruesome practices" (61). As imagined by officialdom and the press, the terrors of China include not just indentured labor but tales of being sold to carnivals and even having one's gall bladder harvested for the Chinese folk medicine *rokushingan*.

This contemporary focus on trafficking to China—which, Ambaras notes, paled in comparison to the internal illegal transactions within Japan—not only highlights empire's perpetual panic and paranoia but also practically cries out for psychoanalysis. And we come close to a Freudian uncanny return of the Chinese (perhaps the id) in Japan's Civilized imperial space with a quote from Carole Silver's account of the Victorian panic over fairy changeling stories: "The possibility that an otherworldly (or primitive) order still lurked at the edges of civilization…" (69). In a similar way, Fukuzawa Yukichi's "Datsu-A Ron" (1885) haunts the history recounted here; his editorial was a shocking call to leave Asia after his fear of absorption into the (in his view) backward Sinosphere following the failed coup against the Korean court.

Likewise, in chapter 2, the many instances of Japanese women marrying Fujianese men are recast in territorial terms as "marriage abductions" in need of rescue missions by Japanese officials. As with children, the Japanese Empire saw these de-territorialized or "un-placed" women as vulnerable to subsumption. Chapter 2 is an extended look at the number of women who fell into "the Antlion's Pit" of marrying "Chinese peddlers" from Fuqing. The chapter includes records of interrogations full of cross-purposes and miscommunications. Here we miss Carlo Ginzburg's "microhistory" (1992) as a reading protocol to excavate the worldviews of subjects who often only appear to the historical record in their contacts with and interrogations by officials and sensationalizing journalists. Ambaras acknowledges that the motives and worldviews of these Japanese women are hard to recover but reprints some transcripts (104–106). The transcripts at least show this confusion by all parties about how to categorize these messy interactions, including the Japanese officials' attempts to "rescue" some women using the very tactics of misrepresentation and coercion they decried: what Ambaras calls “abduction in reverse” (108).

This fear of subsumption by the Sinosphere is made explicit in chapter 4, in which Ambaras explores the popular sensationalist writings of journalist Andō Sakan (1893–1938), who lived in the South China Sea and Hainan Island, especially his fear that the Republic of China, as with the earlier Qing, only assimilates others and is not assimilable itself. The chapter also examines the work of essayist Yamaji Aizan (1865–1917), who saw the Chinese as a people who “spiritually conquer their conquerers and make them the same as themselves” (191).

The epilogue rediscovers this paranoia of absorption by the Sinosphere in the post-World War II period, often involving these very same subjectivities, in the contemporary discussion of Japanese sovereignty and identity. This discussion includes prewar callbacks to the Fuqing marriage abduction narratives seen in Japanese media reporting on crimes by Fujianese in Japan. It also includes the openly racist fearmongering of Bandō Tadanobu, a former Chinese interpreter for the Tokyo police, who warns that sham Japanese-Chinese “paper marriages” and what are known in the United States as “anchor babies” threaten to turn Japan into “a Chinese autonomous region” (229).

Reading *Japan’s Imperial Underworlds* as a study in the self-doubt and panic of empire, I have found much to recommend, especially in the attention to paranoia in the early chapters on child trafficking and marriage abduction narratives. However, as a study in the power relations and strategies of empire, there is perhaps too much of a reduction of imperial power to the concept of territory and territorializing practices. While the long, detailed, and fascinating chapter 3 on the difficulty the Japanese media and officials experienced in trying to classify or “place” the Japanese female “Chinese pirate boss” Nakamura Sueko works well with the book’s focus on “extreme intimacies,” the only occasional appearance of capitalism and biopolitical aspects of empire suggests that the main argument, the *mondai ishiki*, is, to my mind, the suspect assertion that beneath all the grand narratives, imperial institutions, media representations, and global structures, there is the true kernel of historical life: individual agency—ordinary people just trying to make their way in the world.

Throughout the work, agency implicitly emerges in supposedly non-imperialist daily lives that can, at times, come close to appearing anti-imperialist. This focus on territory as *the* apparatus of capture for empire threatens to find in individual agency forms of anti-imperialism where they may not actually be present, and even to suggest that empire is a chimera that can just be lived away. It is likely that some or many of the intimate encounters under consideration here may appear more integrated into empire if we considered other modalities of power, such as those Michel Foucault examined in *Security, Territory, Population* (2009) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2010). There, motion and circulation—rather than the unification of the territory and sovereign power—are not only essential to power but constitutive of and constituted by circulation of people and things. Whereas some of the lives recounted by Ambaras may not have contributed much to capital accumulation and have been incorporated to older, pre-imperial and pre-capitalist networks, capital and empire have ways to subsume even these found relations under their projects.

Outcasts of Empire

Paul D. Barclay's excellent book, *Outcasts of Empire: Japan's Rule on Taiwan's "Savage Border," 1874–1945*, directly takes on these other biopolitical forms of power and imperial interpellations in examining "Japan's Rule on Taiwan's 'Savage Border.'" Barclay starts by comparing the 1930 Wushe Rebellion of native Taiwanese against Japanese colonial officials, which killed 134 people and included attacks with daggers and beheadings, with the 1874 Japanese punitive expedition that began Japan's colonial relationship with Taiwan. The result is a richly detailed account of the emergence of both the elimination of author Joseph Conrad's "white spaces" on the map in the rise of high international imperial competition and the rise and strengthening of indigenous identity. Here the emergence of "indigenous peoples" as an identity is "the other side of the coin of the birth of the modern nation-state system" (11)—a process Barclay provocatively labels "top-down ethnogenesis" (2).

The book's four chapters are extremely rich examinations of specific forms colonial administration and anthropology that emerged at the edges of the Qing Empire's "savage border" and the different approaches nation and empire took in dealing with the people who lived in these regions. Chapters on textiles, camphor, and "wet diplomacy"—a ritual in which two leaders simultaneously consume alcohol from the same cup—and a chapter on photographs and postcards with their captions (many archived in Lafayette College's image database)[1] capture this emerging indigeneity (kudos to the publisher for the large number of images, many in color). Throughout, Barclay provides extremely local ethnographic detail that always remains tied to global trends to produce first "aborigine administration" and later "second-order geobodies" of indigenous zones subsumed but not eliminated, indeed sustained, under the would-be totalizing gaze of the modern nation-state.

Explicitly looking at the Foucauldian modalities of power seen in punishment, discipline, and biopolitics (in other terms: sovereignty, discipline, and security), Barclay shows how imperial and global capitalist power produced a state-settlers-natives nexus of subjectivities within the emerging nineteenth- to twentieth-century international system of competing capitalist empires. Settlers were those who surrendered some of their surplus production to the state and thus came under the disciplinary apparatus and were incorporated into the empire as subjects—even if still differentiated into ethnic hierarchies. Beyond this zone lay the old "savage border" of Qing legal pluralism; these regions and the people living in them were incorporated into the international system as "indigenous territory" and "indigenous peoples." In what I found the most significant part of this analysis, Barclay claims that whereas the settlers were subject to disciplinary (Civilizational) strategies, those in the "special administration" zones were subject to a particularly colonial mix of the older "punishment" characteristic of Foucault's sovereignty with biopolitical inflections, but without the mediation of discipline (29). For "savages" who "took heads," the response was not loss of land but "punishment" in the form of ending gift exchanges and reciprocity, prohibiting alcohol, and denying salt (93). In turn, the groups were governed as biopolitical populations, as the point of contact and site of intervention of state power was not the discipline of the individual but the biopolitical category of *sha*, or "units of governance pegged to residential patterns" (6). The focus on a distinct population fixed to a place shows the reemergence of territory, but one subsumed under the nation-state-empire as a "second-order geobody"—a nation within a nation-state, or a colonial zone within a colony.

---

[1] Barclay is the General Editor of Lafayette College's East Asia Image Collection, available online at https://dss.lafayette.edu/collections/east-asia-image-collection/.

Again, capitalist imperialist competition was the precipitating cause of this multi-spatial order, or the incomplete consolidation of legal centralism. As Barclay puts it, Japan in 1900 simply could not afford to run Taiwan at a loss with the threat of war with Russia. The constant pressure to inexpensively manage an empire dates back to initial contact in 1874, when the arch-Civilizer Okubo Toshimichi called for extension of universal education to Taiwan only to be thwarted by then-Minister of Education Kido Takayoshi, who pointed out that such a policy would be extremely costly and not assured of quick success even in Japan itself (77). The solution was Taiwan's colonial administrator Gotō Shinpei's 1899 establishment of Government-General monopolies on opium, salt, and camphor. Others such as Mark Driscoll's *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque* (2010) have shown how drug receipts turned the Taiwanese administration from one that cost 11 percent of the Japanese budget in 1896—with talk of selling Taiwan back to China in 1898—to a surplus-producing colony in the early 1900s. The camphor monopoly is especially important to the story of indigenous identity. The particular ecologies of the commercially important camphor trees (first for medicine and later for smokeless gunpowder) failed to perfectly map to the settler-aborigine border, leading to the encroachment of the disciplinary apparatus into previously aboriginal areas, but not so much as to lead to a complete eradication of that line.

The constant cost-benefit analysis by the Japanese Empire in deciding whether to completely subjugate the old Qing savage-border groups continues to make itself felt even after the turn to scientific racism becomes the dominant model. The production of a "second-order geobody" within the state borders did not disappear when the shift from expedient forms of governing Qing cartographic remnants gave way to scientific race speaking. Indeed, the category of indigeneity was only strengthened as the new discourse "redefined the 'savages' in terms of unique attributes manifested in language and material culture" (217). Barclay provides an extensive and fascinating examination of photography and postcards as this visuality with tattoos, tools, clothing, and other aspects of material culture became the apparatus of capture of the emerging indigenous identity. With the new scientific claim to universality, the former savages—by virtue of being on the borders of empires—now became fully reified, as their identities no longer depended on their relationships to Qing or Japanese centers; now the new "ethnonym Atayal asserted a *presence*" (218, emphasis in original) and an "indigenous modernity."

This reification went both ways since the state as well as the peoples themselves argued for the presence of the indigenous identity. Barclay shows how this process began as a concession by Japanese officials to lower the cost of running the empire and still resonates in contemporary Taiwanese politics.

There is no space here to recount the details of photo-captioning, anthropological science, and many other stories, but the result is an impressive example of keeping the global context with the local text. *Outcasts of Empire* is not grand theory and details; rather, it theorizes the details.

Barclay is aware that "top-down ethnogenesis" and "indigenous modernity" that is practically "modern indigeneity" can be fraught terms. It is clear from the record that the very "indigenous" category we have today was coproduced with the international system of capitalist competition between nation-states and that indigenous people themselves reified aspects of their material culture. But the author is careful to note that although reification runs through every aspect of the national question, the reification and essentialism of modern indigenous identity is politically different from other groups' reification of their identities in that they were a response to the very real, existential threat of extinction in the international system. As such, the histories examined here hold much for students of empire, the workings of "nation-state-sponsored industrial capitalism," and indigenous movements and identities everywhere. The book should find an audience well beyond East Asian studies.

Placing Empire

In Kate McDonald's *Placing Empire: Travel and the Social Imagination in Imperial Japan*, motion in the form of imperial tourism emerges as a form of instantiating and, in her terms, "placing" people within an imperial framework, constituting them as imperial subjects—however differentiated that process may be for members of different nations within the empire. In this book, the "instability of spatial and social boundaries was an essential component of the operation of early twentieth-century imperialism" (5) as travel through these boundaries "placed" people as various subjectivities within an ethnically differentiated imperial world. In contrast to the grand spatial aims of imperial theory, place only grew in strength and popularity but not necessarily counter to the larger political structures: "indeed, an entire industry, tourism, emerged to produce the experience of place which…became the spatial foundation for the practices of exclusion and dispossession the sustained imperialism" after World War II (5). Mobility here is a form of imperial interpellation, or "ironically" it was through movement across borders that the "sedentarist metaphysics" of the territorial nation-state took hold (50). Here, "place" does not operate in opposition to "territory" by asserting an irreducible and unassimilable local that thwarts all attempts to subsume it into imperial or global structures. Instead, as a verb, "placing" becomes the mode of differentiation and hierarchy of a Japanese Empire built on a multicultural humanism.

The book is divided into two parts that mark the break between a totalizing Civilizational tourism and a later one based on "local color" and cultural (and legal) pluralism, mirroring the famous shift in Japanese imperial policy in Korea after the 1919 March First Movement from military to "cultural" rule. Part 1, "The Geography of Civilization," shows how place first required "seeing like the nation" (chapter 1), namely, through the eyes of a *kokumin*. Often translated simply as "citizen," the term is at once more slippery, specific, and politically charged than this dictionary definition. In the multiethnic empire in which all people had nationality, not all had the status of the *kokumin*. *Kokumin* further did not simply map onto *Nihonjin* (Japanese) but was a special type of political identification closer to the nationalistic and inherently political use of the term by contemporary nationalists like the Atarashii kyōkasho o tsukuru kai (Japanese society for history textbook reform) and its history textbook, *Kokumin no rekishi* (A citizen's history of Japan).

Although supposedly based on mere observation, the tourism of Civilization was elite and, in fact—once the sites in the empire were viewed with the eyes of a *kokumin*—much more an interpellation and a pedagogy of imperial "training" (43). Seeing with the eyes of a *kokumin* in this period of developmental Civilization required a tourist to "unsee the obvious differences between the experience of the individual and the experience of the nation as a whole…to see in the collective past and future tense" (25). Gotō Shinpei made this explicit when he said he "sees" the future wealth of sugar production in Taiwan before it has been built: "If we don't see this future then we are not fulfilling the job of seeing Taiwan" (26). McDonald highlights this Civilizational and "collective past and future-tense" tourism by reproducing and examining itineraries of Korea and Manchuria that are almost exclusively centered on industrial and Japanese sites in the colonies. These include old battlefields of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, industrial sites of the South Manchurian Railway, open-pit mining operations by Japanese *zaibatsu*, and the buildings of the Government-General of Korea itself (59), with a further emphasis on the sites of (imperial) circulation at ports, railways, and the products that flow through them. In contrast to the second phase of "local color" tourism discussed in chapter 4, there are virtually no suggested sites of Korean or Manchurian culture.

After 1918 and especially after the March First Movement in Korea and similar protests for self-determination in China, these tourist circuits remain but their content changes. But part 2, "The Geography of Cultural Pluralism," shows that this relaxation of military rule only strengthened the ethnic and cultural placing of peoples within the empire. This period is marked by the end of elite tourism—as McDonald notes, the cost of the aforementioned two-week itinerary to Korea and Manchuria was roughly equal to a year's tuition at Waseda or Keiō university (44). The new "local color" tourism boom after 1918 was more democratic and social but still found plenty of room for placing people, giving rise to an imperial tourism industry with uneven restrictions on mobility and experiences marked by what McDonald terms the "from-ness" of the individuals in these networks. Sometimes these markers of imperial "from-ness" map onto explicit political threats, like when Koreans were especially suspected of being Communists, but the work of placing was much more totalizing as different nationals had very different experiences at the various checkpoints of the imperial circuits (93). Chapter 4 takes up many of the issues of Barclay's text on ethnic tourism in Taiwan indigenous zones, this time seen through the eyes of the *kokumin* travelers. This discussion is followed by an interesting chapter on the use of proper (Tokyo-dialect) Japanese. Chapter 5 presents the use of Japanese speech as both local color and a kind of shibboleth at checkpoints and other points of contact with imperial officialdom as "imperial travelers produced a sense of the imperial nation as a community divided by intractable linguistic variation, which they read as a sign of the continued unfitness of colonized subjects for full inclusion into the nation" (136), but not, of course, into the empire.

Given mobility and identity's implication in imperial techniques of control pose for historians, here in the form of imperial tourism, neither concept is a simple antidote to the Japanese Empire any more than is the mere invocation of multiculturalism or humanism. Indeed, all three concepts—mobility, multiculturalism, and humanism—were put to great use by imperial apparatuses, a fact McDonald acknowledges. This imperial use causes problems for historians who wish to write a history of any given place without reproducing the imperial project that itself relied on the local and on the "placing" of people.

References

Driscoll, Mark. 2010. *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 2009. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978.* London: Picador.

———. 2010. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979.* London: Picador.

Fukuzawa Yukichi. 1885. "Datsu-A Ron." *Jiji shinpō*, March 16.

Ginzburg, Carlo. 1992. *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth-Century Miller*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Okakura, Kakuzō. 1906. *The Book of Tea*. New York: Duffield and Co.

Tanaka, Stefan. 1995. *Japan's Orient: Rendering Pasts into History.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

About the Reviewer

Robert Stolz is Visiting Associate Professor of East Asian Studies at New York University.