

Introduction

Transnational Flows and Spaces of Interaction in Asia

IT IS TEMPTING TO CONSIDER the articles in this volume as part of migration studies, which is popular among academic scholars and independent researchers. “Migration,” however, apart from being an overused term that has been appropriated by agencies of the state for opportunistic purposes, does not quite capture the multifaceted nature of crossborder movements of peoples. Nor does it do justice to the diverse intentions and rich symbiotic and reciprocal experiences of those who venture into foreign lands, as well as the ambivalent receptions accorded them by recipient societies and their peoples. Additionally, “migration” does not judiciously account for the movement of ideas, languages, and practices across nation-state borders which need not necessarily involve physical travels by individuals, and which, on the whole, illustrate the fragility of such demarcations.

It is probably for the above reasons that two recent publications, which would be labeled “migration studies” under traditional categorization, purposely and consciously avoided the use of the term. Caroline S. Hau and Kasian Tejapira (2011, 1) instead refer to “cross-border circulations of people and ideas” and “transnational mobility” (*ibid.*) as a “logical outcome of a world of ‘flows’ ... that are

propelled by advances in transportation and communication, diffusion of technology and ideologies; large-scale movements of capital, labor, tourists, commodities and cultural artifacts; expansion of mass education; creation of transnational public spheres and institutions; and relocation of production facilities ‘abroad.’

In this context, Hau and Tejapira question the relevance of the nation-state as a unit of analysis given that the “the sheer volume and speed of flows ... have eroded the sovereignty and capabilities of the nation-state, rendering its borders far more permeable than is popularly

assumed and opening it to the world far beyond the reaches and control of the territorially rooted state” (ibid.). Their preferred characterization of the above process, as reflected in their jointly-edited book’s title is “transnational flows and movements.”

The book’s “central organizing concept” (5) is “travel” which is not confined to the “physical movement of people” (ibid.) and includes the “circulations of ideas and discourses enabled by inflows of goods and commodities ... and its transformative effect on individual lives” (ibid.). These are defined by the “contingent and uneven processes of translation, circulation, and exchange” (22).

Harper and Amrith use the terms “sites and spaces of Asian interaction” and, in the edition of *Modern Asian Studies* they co-edited, argue that “by focusing on spaces—real and virtual,” one can “begin to conceive of new ways of capturing geographical imaginations and fluidity of borders and boundaries across Asia” (2012, 249). They work with concepts such as “local cosmopolitanism,” “moving metropolises” and “mobile cities” as characterizations of contemporary Asia (250).

With respect to diaspora studies, Harper and Amrith inform us that while “many recent works on particular diasporas have tended to look inwards—at how distinctive diaspora cultures maintained a sense of ‘home’ while abroad,” their “focus has been on how different diasporas have come into contact with each other in particular places” (250). The point is to “go beyond the oceanic perspectives that have dominated recent discussions of inter-Asian connections” and “to uncover connections that cut across regions” (ibid.).

“Transnational flows” and “spaces of interaction” appear to be more apt analytical frameworks for studying the movements of people and ideas across national borders. In a larger sense, they encompass the rubric of “migration studies” but go far beyond the latter’s current reach and parameters of analysis. With due respect to the four authors mentioned above, we have therefore taken the liberty of borrowing their concepts for this volume’s theme and working title.

Without originally meaning to, the five articles in this current edition of *Asian Studies* fit in nicely with the concepts of flows and spaces. Using historical, economic, socio-cultural, and linguistic studies, Mojares, Vogt, Yang, Santamaria, and Ubalde discuss critical issues and concerns in cross-border interactions and flows in an Asian context. At the same time, they break new ground by uncovering new empirical information and novel ideas which they situate within the purview of critical scholarship.

Resil Mojares, in “**The Emergence of Asian Intellectuals**,” traces the historical roots of Asian intellectual traditions by contextualizing them within an Asian regional context. He terms this a “corrective to the tendency to locate in the West the beginnings of area studies.” Using primarily the experiences of Filipino intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, Mojares notes the contributing factors of the development of anti-colonial movements and the rise of Japan as an alternative development model. Japan had been the Mecca for Asian intellectuals eager to shake off the yoke of Western colonialism. That soon became a false hope, however, as Japan took on a militaristic and imperialist turn and consequently elicited disaffection among these emergent Asian intellectuals.

While recognizing the positive contributions of the notion of “Pan-Asianism” to the development of an Asian intellectual network, Mojares avers that this now should be regarded merely as a “historical artifact.” In its place are the networks of Asian intellectuals that connect “on the basis of shared issues, advocacies, ideologies, and professional concerns.” These, however, are “dynamic linkages that can appear and disappear over time and space; thin out or thicken” as time and circumstances allow and not fed simply “by the ‘social fantasy’ of shared and common origins, culture and destiny.”

Gabriele Vogt’s “**When the Leading Goose Gets Lost: Japan’s Demographic Change and the Non-Reform of its Migration Policy**” illustrates the dilemma of Japan’s policy on foreign workers, which remains basically isolationist and is therefore unable to cope with the country’s demographic changes. These changes have resulted in a shrinking

working population and a consequent decrease in the number of skilled workers and professionals, as well as a healthcare system straining to adequately service an aging population.

Caught in this dilemma are contradictory initiatives among government agencies and business establishments. The situation of weak political parties with no coherent migration program adds to the problem. Vogt suggests bringing in “subnational actors” other than government and business; in particular, citizens who can introduce new ideas and bring about a new and more relevant migration policy. Utilizing the “flying geese” paradigm of economic development but applying it in the case of Japan’s immigration policy, Vogt regards Japan as the “reluctant leading goose” that, while not yet lost, is taking “an awful long time to hover in mid-air.”

Kee Ho Yang’s **“A Critique of Government-Driven Multicultural Policy in Korea: Towards Local Government-Centered Policies”** points to the flaws of South Korea’s policy and programs towards immigrants due to “inefficiency ... lack of adequacy, balance and locality, ... absence of communication among policy makers, overlap of budgets and tasks, and lack of coherence with other programs for foreign residents.” The “heavy focus on immigrants by marriage” and inattention to foreign workers results in a “gap of service programs among.... regions and subjects.”

Yang roots the problem in the overconcentration of power and decision-making in the central government whose policies continually fluctuates between “acceptance and strict regulation” depending on the political weather at a given electoral season. To counteract these inconsistencies, Yang proposes granting an active role to local governments who, in any case, act as the direct hosts of foreign residents. In addition, NGOs, as well as local and foreign residents themselves, should be similarly involved in order to craft a more inclusive multicultural policy.

Marrienne Ubalde, in **“Diverging Narratives: Lives and Identities of Japanese-Filipino Children in the Philippines,”**

uncovers the fluidity of identities of children of mixed Japanese and Filipino parents who are living in the Philippines. These children, who later came to be called *nikkeijin* or *shin-nikkeijin*, were born in the 1980s and 1990s mainly (but not entirely) of Filipina entertainers who worked in Japan or of Japanese tourists in the Philippines. That these identities are “multi-faceted and changing over time” is due to “the different webs of relations that an individual interacts with.”

Transnational connections are explored depicting mixed relationships between the children and their Japanese parent who remained in Japan or a surrogate parent in the Philippines. Organizational ties are important demarcations, however, marking a class distinction between Japanese-Filipino children who are affiliated with support NGOs and those who are not. Those who were relatively better off and were recognized by their Japanese parent were therefore content with their existing situation saw no need to seek the assistance from support NGOs. Ubalde says that “as far as the Japanese-Filipino children are concerned, the seeming divide within this category somehow proves that “ethnic and even racial categories were in fact cross-cut by the class divide.”

MCM Santamaria’s “**From *Tortillier* to *Ingsud-Ingsud*: Creating New Understandings Concerning the Importance of Indigenous Dance Terminology in the Practice and Kinaesthetics of the Sama *Igal* Dance Tradition**” highlights indigenous dance terms in the Sama *igal* tradition of southern Philippines by utilizing research methods from linguistics and cultural studies. Santamaria’s work appropriately fills a gap in dance scholarship which “often leave(s) out the study of indigenous dance terminology.” In looking at four localities in Sulu, Tawi-Tawi and Zamboanga, he discovers that “some degree of significance” in shared dance terms exist, even if universality is not established.

Of relevance to the theme of this *Asian Studies* edition, Santamaria interestingly also draws out “regional affinities” in language use and finds commonalities in Sama *Igal* dance terms with those in Bahasa Melayu,

Bahasa Indonesia, and Central Javanese (Surakarta) dance terminologies. In one sense, his study reinforces the view among some scholars that the Mindanao-Sulu peoples can source its primary identity by reaffirming its cultural affinities with its maritime Southeast Asian neighbors.

As the articles in this volume show, the fluidities and uncertainties of transnational flows, as well as their varying impacts on domestic policies of recipient states, point to a dynamic and exciting field in area studies in Asia. The new spaces of interaction created as a result also open up new research activities for Asian scholars. The field is vast and largely untapped and waits to be further explored and analyzed.

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References

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