

Mobilities, Exclusion, and Migrants' Agency in the Pacific Realm in a Transregional and Diachronic Perspective

Virtual conference organized by the Pacific Office of the German Historical Institute Washington, on June 7–9, 2021, in cooperation with the German Historical Institute Moscow and the German Institute for Japanese Studies Tokyo (DIJ) as part of the Max Weber Foundation's collaborative research project "Knowledge Unbound," submodule "Interaction and Knowledge in the Pacific Region: Entanglements and Disentanglements." Cosponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research and the Institute of European Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Conveners: Albert Manke and Sören Urbansky (both GHI Pacific Office, Berkeley). Participants: Payal Banerjee (Smith College), Sarah Beringer (GHI Washington), Benjamin Beuerle (GHI Moscow), Nan-Hsu Chen (Washington University in St. Louis), Monica Cinco Basurto (Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Iztapalapa), Andre Kobayashi Deckrow (University of Minnesota), Luise Fast (Bielefeld University), David Scott Fitzgerald (University of California, San Diego), Kristie Flannery (Australian Catholic University), Sonja Ganseforth (DIJ Tokyo), Fredy Gonzalez (University of Illinois), Evelyn Hu-DeHart (Brown University), Simone Lässig (GHI Washington), Chrissy Yee Lau (California State University – Monterey Bay), Jeffery Lesser (Emory University), Kathy Lopez (Rutgers University), Ricardo Martínez Esquivel (University of Costa Rica), Mae Ngai (Columbia University), Christoph Rass (Osnabrück University), Gabriel Terol Rojo (University of Valencia), Christina Till (Max Weber Foundation, China Branch Office), David Wolff (Hokkaido University), Kank-

an Xie (Peking University), Elliott Young (Lewis and Clark College), Yufei Zhou (DIJ Tokyo).

This conference brought together historians and scholars from related disciplines to revisit the exclusion of migrants and their agency in coping with exclusion in light of mobility dynamics in the Pacific realm. The participants focused on the ways in which migration, exclusion, and racism have influenced government policies, perceptions of migrants in host societies, and migrants' agency in that region since the nineteenth century.

After introductory remarks by GHI director Simone Lässig, Sören Urbansky, and Albert Manke, the conference started with Mae Ngai's keynote lecture "The Chinese Question: Chinese Migration and Global Politics in the Nineteenth Century" (which is published in this issue of the GHI Bulletin). Ngai investigated the local contexts of transnational anti-Chinese racism in the American West, Canada, Australia, and South Africa during and after the Gold Rushes when "the Great Wall against China" led to the almost simultaneous exclusion of Chinese migrants in white settler societies from the 1870s to the pre-World War I era. She showed that the majority of Chinese gold miners were independent prospectors or worked in small cooperative groups or egalitarian enterprises. The production of difference and exclusionary policies was to a large extent the result of white labor's appeal to their governments to protect them from both capitalism and colored races. Ngai further put the "Chinese question" into the broad panorama of the history of capitalism at the turn of the twentieth century and interpreted the metaphor of the "Great Wall" as a symbol of the global Anglo-American expansion and China's containment, which took the form of gunboat diplomacy and unequal treaties imposed on China as well as of exclusionary laws against Chinese migrants in the white settler societies around the Pacific Rim. In the end, Ngai tackled the current anxiety about China's ascent

to an economic power and the nineteenth century origin of present-day anti-Asian xenophobia. In her comments on the keynote, Payal Banerjee reinforced the importance of abandoning the nation state as unit of analysis and proposed to reconsider race-based social differentiation, identity, and legal infrastructures in light of global capital accumulation. She further proposed applying new technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence to study the intertwined relations of racial issues and capitalism.

The first panel addressed the topic “Regulating Space and Place in Late Qing China.” Nan-Hsu Chen portrayed the Taiwan of the 1860s and 1870s as a contested territory, where imperialist powers, most predominantly Qing China and Meiji Japan, sought to incorporate the frontier societies into their own sovereignty. He argued that frontier people’s choices for subjecthood or statelessness highly depended on the local context and significantly shaped the political development of larger political entities. Christina Till traced the odyssey of the multilingual Manchurian Archive from Qiqihar to various places in Russia, until parts of it returned to China. Through the lens of the changing archival practices concerning the Manchurian Archive, she showcased the complexity of governing the multiethnic and multilingual communities in the border region of Heilongjiang, and the conflicting claims of sovereignty over the region posed by China and Russia throughout the twentieth century. Elliott Young challenged the ordinary narratives of humanitarians that paint Chinese coolies as weak, vulnerable, and powerless victims. Based on an analysis of newspaper articles and reports on Chinese indented labor in Cuba, he came to the conclusion that the majority of Chinese coolies signed their contracts voluntarily due to various personal reasons and thus an oversimplified victim narrative prevents people from grasping the in-depth historical reality. In his commentary, Gabriel Terol Rojo positioned the three presentations in the context of the internal political unrest caused by the Western interference at the

dawn of the Manchu Empire. Echoing Mae Ngai's keynote speech, he emphasized that unequal economic and diplomatic relations between the British Empire and the Qing, and transpacific coolie trafficking were in fact two sides of the same coin.

The second panel was dedicated to "Cultural Encounters and Exclusion along the Pacific Rim." Kristie Flannery analyzed the first forced mass migration in the Pacific World and the continuity with later mass expulsions in Southeast Asia. Between 1769 and 1772, several thousand Chinese *Sangleys* were deported to China, following Spanish royal orders. Flannery centered her paper on Chinese agency and reactions to this brutal treatment: from flight in early years and appealing to the King's grace to elusion and suicide. Luise Fast underscored the vital role interpreters (most often Creoles or Native Americans) played in everyday life in nineteenth-century Russian America (Alaska). She reflected both on the silence historians are confronted with in the sources and on the importance of metaphors used by historians. Kankan Xie presented the story of two competing Chinese school systems in the Dutch East-Indies (1900-1942). While the Dutch-Chinese school system represented a remarkable difference to Sinophobe policies in other countries, its existence vis-à-vis a nationalist-minded Chinese school system eventually contributed to incrementing the existing antagonisms between different Chinese groups and to alienating the Chinese from the Malay-speaking natives. In her comments, Evelyn Hu-DeHart stressed that the papers demonstrated the vastness of the Pacific Ocean and its Rim or Edges, speaking to the spatial and temporal dimension of its peoples' histories. Citing exclusionary Spanish colonial policies and practices, she suggested that the history of exclusion stretches back even further, to the beginning of the European expansion in Asia. In view of the resilience and prompt recovery of expelled Chinese migrants, she proposed to reframe "forced mass migration" as temporary deportation.

Panel three discussed “Hemispheric and Transpacific Approaches Toward Regulating Mobility.” Ricardo Martínez Esquivel traced the ambiguous history of eight decades of Costa Rican legislation directed against Chinese immigration and of discriminating against Chinese migrants. In recent years, a Chinese-financed national stadium and the project to build a new Chinatown in San José underline how much the official mood has changed. However, even though many Costa Rican descendants of Chinese have earned recognition for their diligence and efforts to integrate, Chinese descendants in Costa Rica are still regarded as “other.” Kathy Lopez followed with a comparative view on U.S. anti-immigration policies against Chinese and Eastern European Jewish and Southern European immigration to the Americas in the 1920s. Both often used Cuba as a transit destination for easier access to the U.S.; a significant number stayed in Cuba and integrated in the more open Cuban society – a development supported by restrictive U.S. immigration authorities. Chrissy Yee Lau told the story of Masao Dodo, a young Japanese immigrant in the interwar period, exemplifying a type of “New Man” and the transformation of ideals of masculinity within a changing American and international context. Like others in his generation, Dodo converted to Christianity, propagated Japanese imperialism and found refuge in education after the U.S. 1924 Immigration Act. Likewise, he changed from propagating a Japanese–U.S. alliance in the Pacific to a pan-Asian solidarity under Japanese leadership. In his comments, sociologist David FitzGerald traced similarities between Costa Rica and the U.S. in their restrictive policies against certain immigrant groups and found continuities in contemporary Latin American policies concerning extracontinental irregular migrants, including asylum seekers. He also advocated for a more precise use of generalizing terms like imperialism, (settler) colonialism, and gender as the main category, leading to a vivid discussion of frameworks, stakeholders, and actors of mobility in and to the Americas.

In the fourth panel on “Exclusion, Redemption, and Knowledge,” Kevin Escudero argued that the implementation of U.S. immigration laws in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in the Western Pacific should be considered in the context of U.S. imperialism and militarism. While Mariana lands are consumed by U.S. military bases and operations, this recent expansion of federal power not only puts into question local livelihoods and derails individual life courses, but also encroaches on indigenous sovereignty. The shifting relationship between federal and regional regimes of migration regulation were also a central theme in Andre Kobayashi Deckrow’s study of anti-Japanese immigration law in 1930s Brazil. While Japanese state-sponsored companies facilitating the mass emigration of poor Japanese migrants to Brazil had established strong ties to certain regional governments, the inclusion of new immigration quotas in the constitution not only signified a national project, but also reflected the influence of transnational “expert” knowledge pushing an anti-Asian and anti-immigrant agenda. Displacement and forced migration during the turmoil and wars of the first half of the twentieth century formed the background of the two remaining contributions. Tracing the escape routes of “White Russians” in the wake of the Russian revolution, first to East Asia and later, fleeing invading Soviet troops, southwards to the Philippines and finally the U.S. and Australia, David Wolff highlighted the importance of migrant knowledges and intricate and racialized identity politics, as “White Russians” faced anti-Russian (anti-Communist) as well as anti-Asian (antisemitic) discrimination. Aiming at deconstructing the myth of a diasporic community, Yufei Zhou showed in her presentation on the collaboration of émigré scholars from Europe and China in the U.S. how xenophobic and racist structures in academia and differences in personal backgrounds as much as political and academic convictions led to the failure of a large-scale research project on Chinese history. In his commentary, Jeffrey Lesser stressed the need for new methods and approaches to

rethink the concept of “communities,” to make visible structures engendering racism, oppression, and exclusion, and to go beyond hierarchical demarcations and inclusively embrace the coexistence and interplay of individual and institutional actors at different scales and spatialities.

The last panel on “Agency, Exclusion, and Belonging from the Cold War to the 21st Century” started with Fredy González’s illustration of the fate of the Hongmen (Chinese Freemasons) chapters spreading in various countries during the Cold War era. Drawing primarily on original publications by Hongmen members, he argued that the radicalized ideological rivalry and the division of China into two regimes substantially hampered the networking among Hongmen chapters in different locations. Monica Cinco focused on the history of stigmatization and exclusion of the Chinese population by Mexican authorities and the public during the last century. Based on a chronological narrative of events and discourses directed against Chinese residents and their relatives, she shed light on the historical and political background of the 2012 campaign of the Mexican Chinese descendants to recover the memory of Sinophobia, which was met with a national reconciliation project in 2019. In his commentary Christoph Rass claimed that by emphasizing the processual character of the concept of “diaspora,” scholars of migration can more flexibly grasp the fate of people, organizations, and institutions transcending borders against the background of changing political, economic, and social conditions. He further discussed the importance of dialogue between academic history of transnational migrant organizations and the public/oral history of diaspora communities.

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