The ‘Asian Americas’ and the World: A Transnational History

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Keynote Address
Asia Pacific and the Making of the Americas:
Approaches to Transnational Asian American Histories Symposium
Brown University
April 7, 2011

Abstract: Asians have a long and diverse history in the Americas and have played central roles in the distinct national histories of countries in the region. But Asians have also been part of the "Asian Americas," the interconnected and transnational worlds of Asians in the Americas across, beyond, and underneath national boundaries. The Asian Americas were part of a global relationship between Asia and the Americas, but they were also distinctly American; the product of hemispheric histories, discourses, and power relations as well as ongoing connections to the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. Examining the transnational relationships between and amongst Asians in the Americas and their links to the wider world not only helps us revise our understandings of “Asian America,” it also inspires us to write new global histories of the Americas.

In the seventeenth century, a South Asian slave girl arrived in Mexico. Owned by Spanish Captain Miguel de Sosa, she arrived in Acapulco via a Manila galleon from the Philippines. Christened Mirrha-Catarina de San Juan in New Spain, (what would later become Mexico), she lived and worked in Captain de Sosa’s household in Puebla and became free upon his death. In her later years, she became known as a healer and a Catholic visionary who worked among the poor and sick until her death in 1688. Mirrha-Catarina de San Juan’s journey from India to New Spain reminds us of the long histories that connect Asia to the Americas. She also illustrates how Asians became “American,” a part of and apart from the Americas.

[Slide 2: Mirrha Catarina de San Juan]
Revered as a saint, Mirrha-Catarina de San Juan is believed to have been the prototype for *la china poblana*, “the Chinese girl from Puebla town,” an iconic symbol of Mexican womanhood known for her distinctive dress, hairstyle, and behavior (typically, a white blouse with silk and beaded embroidery, similarly decorated full skirt, and shawl).

[Slide 3: La China Poblana]

In 1860, Xian Zuobang traveled from his native village in Nanhai province to Macao where he hoped to be a teacher. Instead, he was abducted as one of hundreds of thousands of Chinese “coolies” sent to Cuba and Peru. Sixteen years later, he told visiting Chinese officials his story.

[Slide 4: Chinese coolies]

He and many other abductees were first brought to a “Pigpen,” a crowded holding cell in Macao, and then forced to board the “Pigship,” one of the ships used in the lucrative coolie trade, or *la trata amarilla*. Xian and his fellow coolies were shackled and lashed with whips during the long journey across the ocean. “Once we got to the Havana Selling People House, our plaits were cut off, our clothes were changed, and people were allowed to choose and buy,” he explained. Once in Cuba, the Chinese laborers were forced to “eat food that is not even wanted by dogs and do work that is even hard for horses and oxen,” he explained. “We are lashed so often that our arms and legs break and bleed. Hanging, drowning, cutting throats and poisoning – all kinds of suicides take place very day among the Chinese laborers,” he testified. Petitions like Xian Zuobang’s revealed the atrocities of the coolie trade, shaped ideas about Chinese immigration and labor around the world, and helped bring about the demise of the trade in 1874.
John Lee Lum was born in 1842 in Sunwui county in Guangdong, China. Struck with gold fever, Lum left his home for the gold mines of California. He lived and worked there and then began journeys that took him throughout the Americas. Lum made his way north to Canada to work on the trans-Pacific railway, headed south to Brazil, and then to British Guiana before settling in Trinidad. He found work at the well-known Chinese firm of Kwong Lee & Co. before starting his own business in 1885. Within ten years, he became one of the most prominent Chinese businessmen on the island selling cocoa, general foodstuffs, hardware, liquor, and imports from Asia. By the 1900s, he was recognized as the head of the Chinese community in Trinidad.3

Seiichi Higashide was twenty-one when he sailed from his native Japan to seek a new future in Peru. Growing up in poverty in a remote village in Hokkaido, he sailed for Peru in the 1930s. His first choice had been the United States, but the recently-passed U.S. 1924 Immigration Act barred Japanese immigrants, and Canada had followed suit with greater restrictions on Japanese immigration in 1928. With North America closed to Japanese, Higashide turned his attention southward. Tears rushed from his face as the ship left Yokohama. Higashide faced both hard labor and discrimination in Peru. But he eventually settled in the town of Ica, about five hundred miles south of Lima. He taught school and became a shopkeeper while raising a family. “I chased my dreams…and I put down roots in the land of Peru. Deep are my feelings for the Latin country I call my “second motherland,” he wrote in his autobiography.

[Slide 6: Higashide children, 1930s]
When the U.S. and Japan declared war in 1941, U.S. and Peruvian authorities cooperated to remove Japanese considered to be “enemy aliens.” “We of Japanese ancestry were kidnapped in the night by armed detectives, deported to the United States, and forced to spend a long period of detention in internment camps,” Higashide explained. Barred from returning to Peru and unwilling to go to Japan after the end of the war, the Higashide family remained in the United States, which despite hardship and bitterness, eventually became their “third motherland.”

As these brief biographies of Mirrha-Catarina de San Juan, Xian Zuobang, John Lee Lum, and Seiichi Higashide illustrate, Asians have a long and diverse history in the Americas. They came as sailors, slaves and coolies, gold prospectors, prostitutes, merchants, students, revolutionaries, laborers, wives, and families. They lived, worked, and settled in every country in the western hemisphere and were central to the economic, political, and social histories of those nations as well as to the region as a whole. They became “American” by adapting to and integrating into their host societies, finding new “motherlands” as Higashide described, or even becoming regional and national icons, as Mirrha-Catarina de San Juan.

But Asians have also been part of what I call the “Asian Americas,” the interconnected and transnational worlds of Asians in the Americas across, beyond, and underneath national boundaries. Asians circulated throughout the Americas as part of serial migrations that kept them on the move, like John Lee Lum, and they maintained transnational ties to their families and villages across the Pacific as well as to other Asian diasporic communities within the Americas.
The Asian Americas were part of a global relationship between Asia and the Americas, but they were also distinctly American; the product of hemispheric histories, discourses, and power relations as well as ongoing connections to the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. Examining the transnational relationships between and amongst Asians in the Americas and their links to the wider world not only helps us revise our understandings of “Asian America,” it also inspires us to write new global histories of the Americas.

Defining the Asian Americas

Let me first begin by stating the obvious: any state of the field ponderings on this subject must first begin by acknowledging the debt that we all owe to the founding mother of this field – Evelyn HuDeHart. Because of her pioneering work on the Chinese in Mexico and Cuba and her efforts to transnationalize the field of Asian American Studies and connect it to Latin American Studies, we can now conceive of a field that can be called “Asians in the Americas.”⁵ As she remarked at the 2010 Association for Asian American Studies plenary on Asian/Latino/American Studies, the history of Asians in the Americas is an inextricable part of world history. But the dramatic reconceptualization that places them at the center of “American” history writ large has not yet been achieved. “Asians [in the Americas] have been hidden in plain sight,” she noted. It is our job to recover this hidden history and place it at the center of our inquiries into the making of the Americas.

Let’s now deconstruct what I mean in using this term “Asian Americas.” “Asians” is perhaps the easiest. It commonly refers to persons of Asian descent. But the state of scholarship on Asians in the Americas is overwhelmingly dominated by studies on the
Chinese. They are the largest, oldest, and most widely dispersed group in the Americas. An Asian Americas approach would also pay equal attention to Japanese, South Asians, Koreans, Pacific Islanders, and Filipinos for the period up to the mid-twentieth century and ask how these migrations and histories were entangled with each other. Scholarship with more recent chronological frames would expand to include the great diversity of Asians in the Americas, including Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, Thai, Hmong, Indonesian, Tibetan, to name just a few. The frame would also include Asians in the Americas as migrants and remigrants themselves, such as Peruvian and Brazilian Japanese in Japan.

[Slide 7: Map]

Geographically, the term “Americas” is also simple: the lands in the Western Hemisphere, encompassing North America, Latin America, and the Caribbean. How scholars have used the “Americas,” however, has been uneven.

Cuban nationalist leader and writer José Martí protested against the monopolization of the term “America” by U.S. Americans in his influential 1891 essay titled “Nuestra America” ("Our America.")⁶ Writing in exile in the United States, Martí envisioned Cuba’s independence from Spain while worrying about the United States’ growing imperialist intervention and expansion in the Caribbean and Latin America. There were two Americas, “theirs” and “ours,” Martí argued, and while he recommended interaction and dialogue between and among Latin America and the Caribbean as well as between the two Americas, he also advocated for a Latin American regional identity that would counter the rising dominance of the United States.⁷
Forty years later, historian Herbert Eugene Bolton also sought to integrate north and south America together in order to write a history of what he called the “Greater America” of the Western Hemisphere. A historian of the Spanish borderlands, Bolton was president of the American Historical Association in 1932 when he suggested that the countries of the Western Hemisphere shared histories and experiences of exploration, colonialism, independence, and nation-building. “Each national history, is but a thread out of a larger strand,” he declared.8

Bolton himself never completed a synthetic history of the Americas; what he envisioned as a “universal American history…from the North Pole to the South Pole and from Columbus to Now.”9 And Bolton’s “Greater America” framework faced much criticism over the years. Latin Americanists rejected Bolton’s claims of universalities and instead pointed to vast political, economic, cultural, and historical distinctions and inequalities between Latin America and the United States and amongst Latin American nations. Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman particularly took Bolton to task for portraying the United States as “advanced” while Latin America remained dependent on U.S. assistance to progress.10 O’Gorman also suspected the Bolton approach to be complicit with U.S. political motives in Latin America. Bolton himself explicitly claimed that a common American history would be both a positive intellectual and political project that would support the growing “inter-American relations” of the time.11

More recently, the transnational turn in American Studies has reinvigorated an interest in the Americas. Scholars typically pay homage to Martí’s vision of an Americas free of U.S. hegemony. This approach dovetails nicely with the calls to go beyond nation-
centered analyses and to reposition the study of America hemispherically and internationally.\(^{12}\)

What it means to do transnational studies, however, has recently come under scrutiny as scholars have observed that the word “transnational” has become increasingly applied with less and less precision.\(^{13}\) And much of the current interest in hemispheric studies, examines continental integration under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or through efforts to secure North America against terrorism. Scholars, for the most part, treat transnationalism as if it is a new phenomenon, and historical perspectives are largely absent. In contrast, when U.S. historians have tried to promote hemispheric perspectives, their models remain woefully underdefined and undertheorized.\(^{14}\)

Literary scholar Sandhya Shukla, who specializes in South Asian diasporic culture, and Latin American historian Heidi Tinsman have proposed the most productive concept of the “Americas” to date.\(^{15}\) In a 2004 special issue of *Radical History Review* and later in a 2007 anthology, they define the Americas as a “transnational and transregional formation defined against the notion of nation-states.” Their interdisciplinary “Americas” paradigm thoroughly connects Latin America with North America, but also leaves open connections to other sites of “America” such as Hawaii and the Philippines. Eschewing national histories of separate countries as well as a North-South dichotomous comparison of a “developed” United States and a “developing” Latin America, Shukla and Tinsman focus on shared histories of connection and interaction between peoples in the Americas.\(^{16}\)
Space and Place: Connecting the Asian Americas to the Wider World

I would like to expand on Shukla and Tinsman’s conception of the “Americas” to suggest what an “Asian Americas” would look like. The Asian Americas comprise the interconnected and transnational worlds of Asians in the Americas across, beyond, and underneath national boundaries. Geographically, they span the Western Hemisphere north and south, east and west, and connect Asians in the Americas to the wider world. Like Shukla and Tinsman’s “Americas” and this symposium’s definition of “Asian America” as a transnational category and ethnicity, the Asian Americas embody processes and perspectives that go beyond and across nation-states. With its connections throughout the Western Hemisphere and across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans to the wider world, the Asian Americas cannot be viewed from just one national vantage point. Asian migration, communities, and networks – as well as the political, social, and economic responses their presence elicited – were and are simultaneously linked across borders and oceans, inhabiting local, regional, national, hemispheric, and global spaces.\(^{17}\)

This wider geographic framework is significant. It revises and expands upon existing definitions of the Americas that primarily emphasize the connections between the United States and Latin America.\(^{18}\) These would include “hemispheric” or “inter-American” paradigms that analyze relationships between the north and south and are bounded by the land-masses in the Western Hemisphere.\(^{19}\)

The Asian Americas also enlarge the transnational frame of Asian American Studies that privileges trans-Pacific passages, networks, and ties. With an emphasis on its connections to a wider world, an Asian Americas approach thus encompasses more than the north-south axis of much of the “Americas” scholarship and more than the east-west
axis of much of the Asian American Studies scholarship. It goes north to Canada, south
to South America, west to Hawaii and the Pacific World (including Asia), and east to the
Atlantic world and beyond.

What changes when we widen our gaze? Let’s go northward first. Fully
integrating Canada into the Asian Americas is a task that has been long overdue. Some of
the earliest comparative studies of Asians in the Americas examined Chinese
immigration and restriction within the context of the British Empire or within English-
speaking countries of the Pacific. But today, scholars who identify themselves with the
study of Asians in the Americas, or even the “Americas” more broadly, generally
continue to privilege Latin America and leave Canada out.

Canadian scholars themselves are rewriting the histories of Asian immigration
and race in North America. In the 2007 special issue of “Pacific Canada” in Amerasia,
for example, guest editors Henry Yu and Guy Beauregard point out that the histories of
Asian migration to the United States and Canada were “strikingly parallel.” These
similarities and connections (as well as differences) need to be further analyzed.

For example, making Canada a central player in the Asian Americas allows us to
more fully analyze the role of British colonialism and empire in the Americas; what
historian Tony Ballantyne has described as a web or “bundle of [imperial] relationships”
that traversed both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. We should thus recognize that
South Asian migration to the West Indies and Canada was not so much migration to the
Americas, but migration within the British Empire. It also represented just one small
stream of the 32 million South Asians who left the Indian subcontinent between 1840 and
1940. Most indentured laborer migrated to countries bordering the Indian Ocean, and thus
the kulis in the Caribbean could be considered as much a part of the world of the Indian Ocean as they were a part of the Americas.24

Canada’s membership in the British Commonwealth explains its different policies regarding Asian migration as well: Chinese head taxes instead of U.S. style exclusion; a Continuous Journey law barring South Asians instead of the U.S.’s Asiatic Barred Zone. The new questions that Asian Canadian scholarship raise must be incorporated into our larger understanding of the Americas, and it also has to be connected to the ongoing work on Asians in Latin America, something that has not yet been done.

Similar to the project of extending the Americas to fully encompass Canada, an Asian Americas framework must also connect to the Pacific and Atlantic Worlds. Asian American historians have already broken important ground in documenting how Asian migrants created and maintained trans-Pacific networks of migration, capital, and family that were critical on both sides of the Pacific Ocean.25

These trans-Pacific migrant ties would continue to be important in an Asian Americas framework, but other Pacific connections to Hawaii, the Philippines, Australia, and New Zealand, to name just a few sites, should also be made more central. Extending our view to Hawaii, for example, would make clear the relationship between the growing U.S. presence and influence in the Hawaiian Kingdom and emerging anti-Chinese sentiment in the islands during the 1870s and 1880s. It would also more fully integrate the extension of the Chinese exclusion laws to Hawaii and the Philippines after 1898 into the history Chinese exclusion in the United States.26

Connecting the Asian Americas even further across the Pacific would illuminate the parallel and connected histories of migration, gold mining, and opposition to Asian
immigration in Australia, Canada, and the United States as well as the racist discourse and exchange that supported Asian exclusion in the Americas and White Australia immigration laws.  

We are beginning to open up the dialogue between Asian American Studies and Asian Australian Studies. What is needed is concrete research that uncovers these connections and widens our perspective. For example, we might view the incarceration of Japanese in Canada, the United States, and Latin America as part of an “American” phenomenon, but also as a parallel phenomenon among the Pacific’s white settler colonies. Here, a trans-colonial framework might be helpful, as Iyko Day has recently suggested. Australia was first amongst these nations to incarcerate its Japanese residents. It acted under its National Security Act of 1939 to round up nearly all Japanese from Australia and surrounding nations in the twenty-four hours immediately following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Day argues that the parallel incarcerations of Japanese in these nations was a result of the “transnationality of anti-Japanese sentiment across white Pacific nations [and] an index of the race, gender, and sexual property logics of white settler colonialism.”

Extending the Asian Americas to connect with the Atlantic World can be equally powerful. While initially conceived of as a field that focused on the comparative study of European (England, France, Portugal, Spain, and the Netherlands) colonization of the Americas and the transatlantic exchange of political ideas, capital, and diplomacy, more recent Atlantic World scholarship now encompasses many diverse “Atlantic Worlds.” (Paul Gilroy’s Black Atlantic is the best known; others have studied the connections of global working-class solidarity that traveled across the Atlantic).
Where do the Asian Americas connect with the Atlantic world? While the migration and migrant networks were much more continental or Pacific in its orientation, Asian migration greatly impacted the Atlantic world as well. We must first see the migration of Chinese and South Asian coolies to Cuba, Peru, and the West Indies as connected to both the trans-Pacific world of Asian migration and the Black Atlantic world of slavery and the black-white race relations in which Asians found themselves (as seen in Evelyn Hu-DeHart’s work on race in Cuba and Peru). Racial ideologies affecting Asians in the Americas were also a product of Atlantic world Anglo-Saxon white superiority which both the United States and Great Britain used to justify its imperial projects (as seen in Paul Kramer’s work on Anglo-Saxon discourses and U.S. imperialism). The trans-Atlantic world of European migration connected and sometimes clashed with the trans-Pacific worlds of Asian migration. As Henry Yu has recently reminded us, the great transcontinental railroads that Chinese migrants built in the American and Canadian Wests allowed trans-Atlantic Europeans to travel to the West. These newcomers began to define their sense of belonging in these newly settled lands of the Pacific coast through a white settler mentality that excluded both the indigenous peoples and Asian migrants that predated their arrival. Lastly, an Asian Americas approach takes seriously the unique site of the Americas. This means analyzing as a central problematic the shared transnational histories and legacies of European colonialism, displacement and conquest of native peoples, African slavery, independence movements, mass migrations, nation-state building, and growing U.S. hegemony in the Americas and around the world.
This history begins in the early modern era that was shaped by European exploration and colonization of the Americas. The connections forged between Asia and the Americas through the Manila-Acapulco galleon trade would be one beginning point. But we would also want to examine the intersections between indigenous peoples and Asian settlers. New research in both American Indian and Asian American Studies has shed light on the interactions of Chinese migrants and First Nations peoples in British Columbia and the intersecting racializations of Asians and indigenous peoples in the Americas. Studies focusing on the anti-Chinese or Yellow Peril campaigns in Latin America should contextualize them within the contestations over mestizaje identity constructions based on indigeneity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. And scholars have recently pointed to the intersection of indigenous colonization and Japanese internment in the U.S. (where the Japanese American camps were modeled on existing colonial bureaucratic operations and staff from the Bureau of Indian Affairs); in Canada, where government policies and facilities designed for First Nations peoples were proposed for internment; and in Australia, where Japanese were often racially conflated with Aboriginal peoples.

We would need to take seriously where and when Asians have entered into the histories of Africans in the Americas. Asian laborers were explicitly brought in as replacement labor for African slaves and played an integral role in the transition from slave to free labor in the Americas. In Cuba, coolies worked alongside slaves in slave-like conditions. The black-white race relations structuring the economics of labor and definitions of citizenship, national identity, freedom, and personhood laid the critical foundations for how Asians would be viewed, treated, included or excluded. The recent
issue of *Afro-Asia* edited by Evelyn Hu-DeHart and Kathleen Lopez, as well as works by Lisa Yun and Moon-Ho Jung help to illuminate some of these connections between African and Asian Americans.\(^{37}\)

European migration to the Americas is another important site of connection. Comparisons and intersections between Asian and European migrants and settlers help us better understand the politics or race, inclusion, and exclusion in the Americas. For example, whitening policies in Latin America and white supremacy in the United States translated into laws that favored European immigration over Asian immigration. And the restrictions that targeted the Chinese in the U.S. were followed by a new regime of immigration regulation and restriction that eventually also stemmed migration from Europe and dramatically affected the Atlantic world of European migration.\(^{38}\)

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries encompassed a number of independence movements and nation-state building projects in the Americas. How did Asians figure into these political transformations? It is clear that in many countries, debates over Asian immigration coincided with and shaped larger debates over national identity during these times of transition. Historians of the Mexican revolution, for example, have shown how sinophobia and Mexican nationalism based on a celebrated mestizo heritage became intermingled with a revolutionary commitment to "Mexicanize" the country and its economy.

[Slide 8: Jose Maria Arana]

Alan Knight claims that in Sonora, *indigenista* nationalism was "logically related" and even "interdependent" on the growth of the anti-Chinese movement. Others point out that while “national” and “pro-fatherland” campaigns had different definitions of what it
meant to be Mexican in this new era, leaders of the anti-Chinese committees had a "definite conception of what it did not include – the Chinese." 

[Slide 9: “Who Will Defend Canada?”]

Both Australia and Canada were fond of declaring themselves "white men's countries," and they did so within the context of restricting Asian immigration. For example, the anti-Chinese campaigns in British Columbia coincided with the province’s 1871 admission to the recently formed Dominion of Canada. As a western outpost far removed from the center of political power in Ottawa, British Columbia was a new settler society where membership was increasingly framed a white provincial identity.

One last common thread in the histories of the Americas is the growing economic, political, and military hegemony of the United States during the twentieth century. U.S. capital, political prerogatives, and military might expanded exponentially in the Americas and across the Pacific during the American 20th century. Asian laborers were linked to U.S. business interests and often followed U.S. capital to other areas in the Americas. Their connection to the yankees often increased the animosity directed toward them. Conversely, their alleged threat to U.S. national security triggered policies of hemispheric security as the evacuation and removal of some Japanese Latin Americans to the United States by U.S. military forces illustrates.

**Approaches**

Now that I have given a few examples of how and when the Asian Americas have connected to the wider world and to the history of the Americas, let me now turn to what an Asian Americas framework looks like and how we might engage with it.
Asians in the Americas

Almost twenty years ago, the renewed interest in diaspora studies led to more attention to the wide dispersal of Asians throughout the Americas, especially to Latin America.\textsuperscript{42} Since then, there has been an explosion of recent scholarship on Asians in the Americas. Numerous community studies on specific ethnic groups in specific regional or national setting have helped us document the presence, labor patterns, and communities of Asians throughout the Americas. Studies that focus on Chinese immigrants, especially in the United States, dominate the field, but scholarship on Japanese, Chinese, and South Asians throughout the Americas are also represented.\textsuperscript{43} The latest scholarship expands and complicates our understandings of these communities in numerous ways.\textsuperscript{44}

The breadth and depth of this recent scholarship has even produced some excellent reference books and syntheses that begin to chart this expansive history. These include: Lynn Pan’s \textit{Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas} and Akemi Kikumura-Yano’s \textit{Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas}. Both have been instrumental in surveying the scholarship in a wide range of languages. Daniel Masterson’s survey \textit{The Japanese in Latin America} is another useful survey, and there are now numerous anthologies examining the Asian diasporas in the Americas\textsuperscript{45}

The histories, lives, labor, and social conditions of Asians in the Americas are at the heart of an Asian Americas approach, but if our focus is to examine the transnational and interconnected worlds of Asians in the Americas, we need to move beyond community studies of specific ethnic groups in distinct national settings.
Comparison

Seeking out comparisons, commonalities, and divergences amongst and between Asian diasporas in the Americas is a necessary first step towards reaching this goal. Scholars have engaged in comparative studies since the 1920s. More recently, anthropologist Lok Siu points to provocative questions awaiting further research: How have Asians become part of nation-states in the Americas? What are the different politics of national integration? How have Asians’ homeland relationships impacted their lives in the Americas and how do they compare across group (Chinese vs. Japanese, and country (Brazil, U.S., Chile, etc.) As promising as these questions are, however, comparison alone is limiting and does not allow us to fully engage in transnational perspectives and processes. Nation-based comparisons obscure the fluid and interactive processes of migration and the economic, familial, political, and cultural worlds that cross borders and oceans.

Transnational Histories of Connection

Ideally, an Asian Americas framework goes beyond comparison to illuminate transnational histories of connection and tension within and across the Americas and beyond to the wider world. It would draw from comparison to connect national histories to each other and to larger international and/or global processes. Thinking about combining both diasporic and transnational approaches is productive. Considering transnational exchanges and connections as a problem of scale, as Richard White has explained, or as overlapping worlds, is also helpful here. We know that history takes place on multiple spatial scales: local, regional, national, and global. No one scale alone
truly captures the complexity and magnitude of the past. As White explains, “each scale reveals some things while masking others.” One way to address this problem is to write history “that does not have to choose between the local, regional, national, and transnational, but can establish shifting relationships between them.”

We might ask: How did people, ideas, political movements, culture, networks, and capital move across the national borders of countries in the Americas and beyond? How did identities and communities get formed in the borderlands of nation-states? How were racial and national identities formed within both national and transnational contexts? And how did dialogue, politics, culture, conflicts, domination, and resistance move across, beyond, or underneath national boundaries and regions?

We might first look at migrations and the world of the migrants. Trans-Pacific passages brought Asians to the Americas, but Asians then moved north and south and east and west within the Americas as the search for employment, land, family, and freedom from persecution pushed them to stay on the move. Their migrations were often circular or part of a larger series of moves within the Americas. Migrations begun in one country often led to a later journey to another location in the region. Migrations were often diverted to other destinations as the doors to some countries closed to Asians. Other transnational moves were forced – expulsions, deportations, repatriations, and incarcerations.

We would want to examine the transnational social, political, and commercial networks that linked migrants to their homelands and to each other across the Americas. For example, a multinational network of Chinese and white labor recruiters brought Chinese from Hong Kong and the Pearl River Delta across the Pacific to fill labor
shortages on Hawaiian and Caribbean plantations and mines and railways in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.\textsuperscript{54} The Chinese Six Companies, a mutual assistance organization formed in San Francisco in 1862, originally provided social organization and mutual assistance to Chinese in California. Eventually, it came to control a multinational network of labor recruiters in China and California that sent Chinese throughout the Western Hemisphere. It was amongst the most successful entities managing the emigration of 180,000 Chinese to the North American West between 1849 and 1882.\textsuperscript{55}

Class, gender, and sexuality would also be at the center of a transnational history of the Asian Americas. Where Asians fit into national campaigns to attract and assimilate certain types of desirable migrants (white, male, skilled) and exclude others (racialized, female, sexually threatening) intersected with international relations and transnational discussions over slavery and freedom, whiteness and blackness, respectability, racial mixing, and the international regulation of migration.

Finally, the globality of race in its many formations would help us understand the structures of law and membership in national and transnational contexts. The “problem” of Chinese labor – what Alexander Saxton called the “indispensable enemy” – was discussed throughout the Americas, across the Pacific and Atlantic and in white settler societies in Africa, the Americas, and Oceania. The Chinese male laborer was both desired for his use as cheap, temporary labor and despised for the alleged economic and sexual threats the predominately male population posed. The “Chinese problem” was part of a global conversation about the “race problems” and the potential solutions that Anglophone thinkers, managers, diplomats, travelers, and entrepreneurs discussed
together in Capetown, Sydney, San Francisco, Honolulu, Mobile, and Vancouver. The United States was the first to exclude Chinese laborers in 1882 with its Chinese Exclusion Act. By 1909, twelve other countries or U.S. insular possessions in the Western Hemisphere had also passed laws that restricted or excluded Chinese immigrants.

[Slide 10: Restrictions on Chinese Immigration]

Race riots and racial violence targeting Asian immigrants also reverberated throughout the Americas. In 1907, Japanese immigrants were attacked in San Francisco; South Asian laborers were expelled from Bellingham, WA; the Japanese and Chinese neighborhoods in Vancouver, British Columbia were destroyed by a 10,000-person rioting mob. Chinese were massacred in Torreon, Mexico in 1911 and assaulted in Jamaica in 1918.

[Slides 11 and 12: Bellingham and Vancouver Riots]

In 1908, Canada barred South Asians from entering the country; by 1917, the United States had followed suit. Japanese were excluded from the United States in 1924 and from Canada in 1928. After Chinese and Japanese migration shifted southward, Latin American countries began to react with their own policies. Mexico expelled Chinese immigrants from the country in 1931 and forced them over the border into the United States. Brazil restricted Japanese immigration in 1934. Peru did the same two years later. An anti-Japanese riot destroyed Japanese immigrant-owned homes and businesses in Lima in 1940.

[Slides 13 and 14: Restrictions on Asian Immigration]
On the eve of World War II, transnational discussions surrounding the “yellow peril” of Asia and Asian immigration – represented by a sinister invading Asian horde penetrating a defenseless America from without and within – had been firmly established in the Americas. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor set in motion the removal and incarceration of peoples of Japanese descent.

[Slide 15: Japanese Incarceration in the Americas]

Five days after U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 ordering the removal of the Japanese American west coast population, the Canadian Order in Council P.C. 1486 similarly uprooted 20,000 Japanese Canadians and exiled them to interior parts of British Columbia. Just one day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Peru's President Manuel Prado pledged his country's cooperation in the new U.S.-led program for the common defense of the hemisphere. What began as state control of Japanese Peruvian assets eventually led to the forced evacuation of 2,118 Japanese Peruvians to the United States on U.S. military ships and at the request of the United States.

[Slides 16, 17, 18: Evacuation of Japanese in the U.S., Canada, and Latin America]

The Nation in Transnational Histories of Connection

These few examples of the interconnected, transnational histories linking Asians in the Americas to each other does not mean that the nation and the importance of nation-state making would be ignored. Many projects affecting Asians in the Americas – immigration regulation, detention, deportation; naturalization; incarceration – were nation-based, and crossing and questioning national borders should not simultaneously erase the inequalities that created those same borders and divisions. We need to fully
consider how local, regional, and national histories emerge from and shape larger transnational processes. It would be important to avoid any Bolton-like mistakes of seeing only commonalities and connections as well. In other words, the goal would be to widen the transnational lens while simultaneously paying attention to national, regional, and local forces and projects and how they interact with each other.⁵⁸

The case of the United States is particularly important here. The U.S. played a central role in this larger history of Asians in the Americas. It was the home to the largest populations of Asian immigrants in the Americas; it was the first country to pass laws restricting Asian immigration; and it was an imperial power with growing influence over the Western Hemisphere. We need to be vigilant about acknowledging this hegemonic presence without letting the United States dominate either the content, perspectives, questions, approaches, and sources. As Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire Fox warn, the United States should not be fixed “as primary interlocutor vis-à-vis other countries.” They and others suggest that Canadian, Latin American, and Australian Studies must be placed on equal footing with American Studies as “protagonists rather than mere recipient sites of U.S. policies and of U.S.-based theoretical perspectives and comparative paradigms.”⁵⁹

One way to accomplish this might be to avoid fixing the starting point on one specific geographic site looking outward; instead, we might have multiple starting points or perspectives that travel south, then north, across the Pacific and back again. This allows us to ask questions such as: What was the impact of Canada on the United States? Brazil on Peru? Hawaii on Canada? How were Canada, the United States, and Peru connected?
Another way of privileging intersections and interconnections is to follow the lead of borderlands scholars who have done some of the most compelling work of this kind. Robert Chao Romero’s *The Chinese in Mexico*, Grace Delgado’s forthcoming book *Making the Chinese Mexican*, Andrea Geiger’s work on Japanese immigrants in the Pacific Northwest and along the U.S.-Canadian border, Eiichiro Azuma’s work on Japanese communities in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, and Karen Leonard’s early study of Punjabi-Mexican families in Southern California’s Imperial Valley come to mind.\(^{60}\)

But we might push our geographic frame beyond the physical sites of the U.S.-Mexico or U.S.-Canadian borders to consider other crossroads where people, culture, capital interconnected with each other and with other sites around the world.\(^{61}\) The Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco might be one. It served as a major transit point for Asians to and from Mexico and Canada on their way from or to Asia and for other Asians coming from Latin America into the U.S. Other key crossroads of interaction might include exchanges between Pacific Coast ports like San Francisco, Vancouver, Honolulu, and Sydney; the Anglo-American web connecting Ottawa, London, and Washington, DC; a Caribbean / Gulf Coast route including Havana and New Orleans.

*Making Sense of the Connections*

Once we globalization the histories of Asians in the Americas, we not only see specific events in a larger frame; we also understand how Asian migrations and the experiences of Asians in the Americas were connected across the Americas and to events and processes in the wider world.
But is it enough to globalize discrete chapters in the histories of Asians in the Americas? Is there a larger pattern of convergences and divergences? Let me try out one hypothesis in the entangled histories of Asian migrations and race and regulation in the Americas: Consider, for example, the creation of the Asian Americas, a world in motion where people, culture, capital, and ideas circulated across to and within the Americas at the same time that national borders and transnational gate-keeping mechanisms were being erected to limit that very movement.

The two are inextricably linked to each other. Both migrating Asians and migrating racial discourses moved along the same grooves and circuits and directly affected each other. The exclusion of Chinese migration to North America resulted in new migrations from Japan, Korea, and South Asia. As these groups became barred, Filipinos – as U.S. nationals – began arriving on the U.S. mainland and Chinese and Japanese migration to Latin America and the Caribbean increased.

It was the very mobility of Asians throughout the Americas that engendered transnational discussions about race and immigration regulation. Nations enforced its borders and instituted new regimes of immigrant screening, surveillance, and policing, and the transnational worlds of Asian migrants were transformed. But they did not stop being transnational.

As the doors to many countries were closed to Asian immigrants during the era of Asian exclusion, staying on the move across and underneath national borders became a central feature of Asian migrant lives. Take for example, the case of John Lee Lum, the Chinese migrant who started in California, went north to Canada, south to British Guiana,
Brazil, and ended up in Trinidad, who I profiled in my introduction. Or Seiichi Higashide who was redirected to Peru because North America was closed.

[Slides 18 and 19: Chinese and Japanese Migrations]

There was also Fukuhei Saito, who sailed from Kobe, Japan to Salina Cruz, Mexico in 1906 as a contract worker destined to work in the mines. But Saito never intended to stay in Mexico. Shortly after landing in Salina Cruz, he and about fifty of his fellow ship passengers decided to make a run for the U.S. border. It took two weeks of stealthily walking northward, sleeping in fields, searching for water in the desert, and stealing produce from nearby farms, but they finally made it to El Paso, Texas and into the United States.64

[Slide 20: Japanese Map]

Saito was able to cross into the United States. Suchiat Singh, who applied for admission to the U.S. in 1914 through San Francisco’s immigration station on Angel Island, was not as fortunate. In his interview with immigration officials, he explained how he had left his home in Punjab three and a half years earlier to go first to the Panama Canal Zone for six months, then to Lima, Peru for three months, then to Havana, Cuba and Vera Cruz, Mexico where he peddled cloth. When he reached San Francisco, he was trying to join an uncle who was already in California and planned to continue to make a living as a peddler. His circuitous journey throughout the Americas ended on Angel Island. He was deported as a person suffering a "dangerous contagious disease" and as a "person likely to become a public charge" and was returned to India.65 Migration and exclusion thus went hand in hand, setting in motion increased mobility for some, decreased mobility for others.
In the overlapping worlds of Asian migration and exclusion in the Americas, new transnational migrant networks and activities developed. Robert Chao Romero has recently shown how the Chinese in Mexico maintained economic and familial ties with their southern Chinese villages and simultaneously developed transnational ties with other Chinese communities in the Americas in the form of merchant networks and transnational commercial orbits as well as a multinational business in human trafficking designed to work around and against the Chinese exclusion laws in place in the United States.66

Connecting the discrimination they faced in Canada and the United States with the colonized status of their homeland, South Asians in North America engaged in transnational Indian nationalist politics. British subjects in name, South Asians in Canada and the United States expected to have the same rights, privileges, and responsibilities as other British subjects. When the British government failed to protest the rampant discrimination they faced in North America, they realized that their equal status was merely a fiction. Increasingly, they found the revolutionary message of Indian nationalists who advocated for the overthrow of British rule in India more and more appealing. Nationalists and their activities routinely crossed the U.S.-Canadian border, and were part of a global anti-colonial movement in which South Asians challenged laws all over the British Empire.67

It is the very tension between transnational migration and international immigration regulation that connects the histories of Asians in the Americas with global histories of race and immigration regulation. Trans-Pacific and inter-American migrations and diasporic networks created the transnational Asian Americas and
sustained this world in motion. Race in the Americas was also transnationally shaped by global anxieties and changing international relations. The resulting hardening of national borders and the internationalization of immigration regulation restructured how Asians moved across borders. For some, mobility became limited as it became harder and harder to cross and recross national borders under the age of exclusion. Or movement across and within national borders was a result of forceful state action: deportation, expulsion, repatriation, and incarceration. For others, migration and migrant networks were diverted to other locations in the Americas. The transnational worlds of the Asian Americas were transformed in the midst of, and sometimes because of, American gatekeeping measures.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Let me conclude by going back to where I started from. The seventeenth-century Mexican slave, Mirrha-Catarina de San Juan, the Chinese Cuban coolie Xian Zuobang, the Trinidadian merchant John Lee Lum, and the Japanese Peruvian internee Seiichi Higashide all represent distinct histories of Asians in the Americas. But put together, they also help tell a much wider story that connects Asians in the Americas to each other and to the wider world.

The time is ripe for a bold, new approach that helps us weave these various threads together in ways that connect Asians in the Americas to world history. I am hoping that an Asian Americas approach can help us get there. The Asian Americas span the western hemisphere, north and south, east and west, and connect the Americas to Asia as well as to the Atlantic and Pacific worlds. It takes seriously the unique histories and legacies of the Americas and asks where and when Asians enter into them. An Asian
Americas framework goes beyond the documentation of Asians in distinct ethnic and national settings in the Americas. It also builds upon comparative analyses to illuminate transnational histories of connection and tension within and across the Americas and beyond to the wider world. In doing so, we expand, complicate, and revise our understandings of “Asian America,” the making of the “Americas,” and world history.


6 Martí, a Cuban nationalist who, among other things, opposed U.S. expansionism into Cuba specifically and U.S. hemispheric domination generally, has come to serve as a central figure in the movement to define a hemispheric American Studies. Martí’s America was the “heterogeneous formation of countries that lay to the south of the United States, which should stand in strong alliance against unfair incursions from the north.” Tinsman and Shukla, “Editors’ Introduction,” *Radical History Review* 89 (Spring 2004): 1-10 (1); “Introduction: Across the Americas,” in *Imagining Our Americas*, 4.

7 Martí argued that “the scorn of our formidable neighbor, who does not know us, is the greatest danger for our America; and it is imperative that our neighbor know us, and know us soon, so she shall not scorn us, for the day of the visit is at hand.” Jose Martí, “Our America” (1891), in *the America of Jose Martí: Selected Writings of Jose Martí, translated from the Spanish*, ed. Juan de Onis (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1954) 149-150; Tinsman and Shukla, “Editors’ Introduction.” 1. Sonia Torres draws on Martí to argue against the continued appropriation of the word “America” to signify U.S. national space. See Torres, “US Americans and ‘Us’ Americans; South American Perspectives on


The 1930s inaugurated Pres. Franklin Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor” policy that would lay the foundation for a policy of hemispheric solidarity during World War Two. O’Gorman’s claim that was perhaps strengthened by the fact that Bolton himself was viewed by the U.S. State Department as an expert in inter-American relations during the 1930s. Many of Bolton’s students went on to work in the State Department as well. Magnaghi, *Herbert E. Bolton*, xii.


Some approaches employ transnationalism to “interrogate the centrality of the nation-state” (Thelen, “Nation and Beyond,” 968-9) focus on a “range of connections that transcend politically bound territories and connect various parts of the world to one another” (Beckert, “AHR Conversation: On Transnational History,” *AHR* 111:5 (2006) para 20-24); consider the “historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods and the social, political, linguistic, cultural, and economic crossroads generated in the process;” (Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures,” *AQ* 57:1 (Mar 2005). Most helpful and precise is the definition from Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt who posit that transnational studies not only focuses on dynamics across or beyond nations, states, or within the (nation-) state system. They also propose “an optic or gaze” that turns traditional perspectives around. Instead of understanding transnational phenomenon and dynamics as a result of or subset of those “occurring somewhere between the national and global,” they suggest starting with studying how the overlapping and interacting transnational social fields create and shape “seemingly bordered and bounded structures, actors, and processes.” They go on to define five different types of transnational studies: empirical transnationalism (describing transnational phenomena or dynamics to identify and explain similarities, differences, linkages and interactions), methodological transnationalism (reclassifying data to reveal transnational forms and processes), theoretical transnationalism, (formulates explanations and interpretations that elucidate
transnational processes better than traditional theories), philosophical transnationalism (adopts a meta physical assumption that social worlds and lives are inherently transnational), and public transnationalism (creates space to imagine and legitimate options for social transformation by purposefully adopting a transnational framework. This work employs empirical (Khagram and Levitt, “Constructing Transnational Studies,” The Transnational Studies Reader, 2, 5.


15 Shukla and Tinsman are also inspired by contemporary events, notably the global paradoxes that are situated in the Americas: the demographic shifts in the United States stemming from the dramatic increase in the Latino population in the country, now considered the nation’s largest ethnic minority; contentious political and cultural battles over the U.S.-Mexico border and border control; the creation of the U.S. military facility in Guantanamo, Cuba. They also seek to break out of the paradigmatic “Area Studies” prison that created U.S. American Studies and Latin American Studies during the Cold War. U.S. American Studies was rooted in the United States’ larger political and ideological imperatives of building and maintaining U.S. political, economic, and cultural hegemony. Similarly, the formation of Latin American Studies was tied to the United States’ attempts to “measure Latin America’s capacity for U.S.-style capitalist democracy and military trustworthiness.” Shukla and Tinsman, “Introduction,” Our Americas, 2-4, 7.


17 World historians are just beginning to integrate world migration into world migration history. See Patrick Manning, Migration in World History (New York: Routledge, 2005); Adam McKeown, Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Donna Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder, eds., Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s (Brill, forthcoming, 2011).

18 Marti’s seminal essay, for example, became “shorthand” for a model that integrated Latin America and United States. Shukla and Tinsman, “Introduction,” Our Americas, 4.

19 A global perspective would also go beyond recent calls to integrate Asian American and Latin American Studies together. For example, Robert Chao Romero has sketched out a field called Asian-Latino studies, or Chino-Chicano studies, in which “the historical and contemporary interactions between Asians and Latinos in Latin America and the United States as well as analyze the historical and sociological experiences of the large population of Asian-Latinos currently living in the United States.” Robert Chao Romero, The Chinese in Mexico, 1882-1940 (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010) 197.

20 See, for example, Persia Crawford Campbell’s study, Chinese Coolie Emigration to Countries within the British Empire (London, P.S. King and Son, 1923); T.Y. Char, “Legal restrictions on Chinese in English-speaking countries of the Pacific,” (MA Thesis, University of Hawaii, 1932). Joan Jensen’s 1988 study of South Asians in North America also examined both migration to and political events in both the United States and

21 For example, the questions that shaped the special 2002 issue of *Amerasia* titled “Asians in the Americas: Transculturations and Power (guest edited by Evelyn Hu-DeHart and Lane Hirabayashi) primarily referred to Asians in Latin America and/or the U.S. The editors did raise the question: “Should scholarship on Asian Canadians be part of our issue [or not?]” See Russell Leong, “One Decade Later: Asians in the Americas,” *Amerasia Journal* 28:2 (2002) vi.

22 Yu and Beauregard’s conceptualization of a “Pacific Canada” connects with the larger Asian Americas paradigm I am suggesting here. Both aim to understand the broader history of migration and settlement of people and trade from across the Pacific in both national and transnational perspectives that connect to the Pacific world as well as to the Americas in the past and present. Henry Yu, “Towards a Pacific History of the Americas,” *Amerasia Journal* 33:2 (2007) xi-xix (xiii, xviii, xix)  


30 Paul Gilroy looked at the Atlantic connections forged together by a history of the African slave trade, racial oppression, and colonization and argued that within this Black


34 Tinsman and Shukla identify two illuminating examples: “an Americas history of slavery and/or slave rebellions would consider shared influences and dynamics among parts of the United States, Brazil, Venezuela, and the Caribbean (including English-, French-, and Spanish-held islands). An Americas history of independence struggles might examine conversations taking place between leaders’ points of collaboration and disagreement.” Tinsman and Shukla, “Introduction: Across the Americas,” in *Imagining Our Americas*, 6. Tinsman and Shukla, “Editors’ Introduction,” *Radical History Review*, 3-5. See also Yu and Beauregard who advocate for a “Pacific Canada” approach that would examine the role of trans-Pacific migration “multiple directions throughout the Pacific region and [place] the long history of racism and exploitation of Asian labor within the context of expropriation and displacement of Native peoples by European colonialism across the Americas and the Pacific Islands.(Yu and Beauregard, xiii, xviii, xix)

35 See the Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia’s project, “Chinese Canadians and First Nations: 150 Years of Shared Experiences,” which focuses on the relationships between Chinese Canadians and First Nations people of the province. <http://www.chinese-firstnations-relations.ca/index.html> (accessed March 15, 2011). On the intersecting racializations of Asians and indigenous peoples in the Americas, see, for example, Juliana Pegues’ work that examines how travelogues and anthropological texts configured Native Alaskans as similar to “Orientals,” particularly Chinese and Japanese following the U.S. purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867. As a result, Native Alaskans were often positioned as superior to and more exotic than other American Indian groups and simultaneously inferior to and innately separate from white Americans. Juliana Pegues, dissertation research in progress, University of Minnesota. In South America, Japanese were at times linked to the Incas of Peru. In 1920, the Japanese community in Peru participated with the rest of the country in celebrating Peru’s centennial celebrations of its independence from Spain. Their efforts focused on erecting a bronze statue of Manco Capac, founder of the Inca dynasty and the Peruvian nation. Japanese scholars
and government officials likened the Incas to the Japanese, with some even arguing that
the Incas originally came from Japan. Some Peruvians found such claims to be veiled
threats of a Japanese-indigenous coalition against Peruvian elites. Apristas “raised the
spectre of Japanese-led Indian hordes aiding in the conquest of Peru” and publicized
reports that the Japanese were exploring the Central Highway to the Sierra and taking
detailed notes. See C. H. Gardiner, *The Japanese in Peru* (University of New Mexico
Press, 1975) 78-79; J. F. Normano and Antonello Gerbi, *The Japanese in South America:
An Introductory Survey with Special Reference to Peru* (New York: John Day Col, 1943)
63-64); Orazio Ciccarelli, “Perú’s Anti-Japanese Campaign in the 1930s: Economic
Dependency and Abortive Nationalism,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* V
(1981-82) 128.
36 Iyko Day, “Alien Intimacies,” 110-115; Stephanie Bangarth, *Voices Raised in Protest:
Defending North American Citizens of Japanese Ancestry, 1942-1949* (University of
British Columbia Press, 2008).
37 *Afro-Hispanic Review* 27:1 (Spring 2008); Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*; Moon-Ho
Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Johns
Hopkins University Press, 2006).
38 Henry Yu, “The Intermittent Rhythms of the Cantonese Pacific,” in Gabaccia and
Hoerder, *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean rims* (forthcoming); Gabaccia, “A
Long Atlantic,” 13-14.
39 Alan Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910-1940." In *The Idea
of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, edited by Richard Graham, 71-114. Austin:
in Sonora, Mexico, 1900-1931," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 1974) 199-
200.
40 Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s
Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 2008); Peter W. Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and
Public Policy Toward Orientals in British Columbia* (McGill-Queen's University Press,
1978); Patricia Roy, *White Man’s Province* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia
Press, 1990); *The Oriental Question: Consolidating A White Man's Province, 1914-41*
41 While the Spanish, Portuguese, British, Dutch, French, and Russian first colonized the
Americas beginning in the fifteenth century, it has been the United States that has been
the dominant power in the western hemisphere and in the world from the twentieth
century to the present. In the Americas, the U.S. replaced European powers, especially
Britain, as the primary foreign investor and power in the region.
42 See, for example, the 1989 special issue of *Amerasia* titled “Asians in the Americas:
Interpreting the Diaspora Experience. In 2002, *Amerasia* followed up with a special issue
that examined how Asians in the Americas fit in with a multipolar global power systems.
See *Amerasia*, “Asians in the Americas: Transculturations and Power.”
43 Early scholarship focused primarily on community studies and projects of historical
Immigration* (New York, Henry Holt, 1911). "East Indian Immigration to British
Columbia and the Pacific Coast States." *American Economic Review* 1:1: 72-76; Millis,


47 Siu also asks questions comparing within and between diaporas: “How do internal differences (religious, generational, etc); national differences (Chinese in Peru vs. Chinese in the U.S.), and diasporic group differences (Japanese and Chinese in Panama) shape lived experiences and identities?” Siu, Memories of a Future Home, 201-205.

48 As Micol Seigel points out, comparative history “has been shaped by overtly political comparisons that have helped produce the very notions, subjects, and experiences of national difference that in turn attract further comparative study.” Seigel, “Beyond Compare,” 63). On comparative or “cross-national” history, see George M. Fredrickson, “From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History,” Journal of American History 82 (Sept. 1995) 587-604.


52 Lok Siu defines “serial migration” as “a process of migrating to a series of places – sometimes returning repeatedly to the same place – over an extended period of time.” Serial migration “describes a…profound engagement with dwelling places...It is partly an effect of geopolitical circumstance, partly a strategy of social mobility, and partly caused by accidents of history. Serial migration is not restricted to any mode of border crossing. It broadly describes the process of migrating more than once and having a meaningful engagement with the different places of settlement.” Diasporic Chinese, Indians, Korean, and Filipinos have all engaged in serial migrations. Memories of Future Home, 87.

53 These communities made up just part of the larger network of diasporic Chinese settlements around the world. Siu argues that from these networks came a “diasporic consciousness of being Chinese in and of the Americas.” Siu, Memories of a Future Home, 89.

54 Brokers typically sent laborers across the Pacific on the “credit-ticket” system, whereby they sold the tickets for trans-Pacific steamship passage to the recruits on credit. Sucheng Chan, Asian Americans: An Interpretive History (Twayne Publishers, 1991) 30. Chinese labor recruiters like Wei Laoying sent workers from Hong Kong, Macau, and the Pearl River Delta to build railroads for American and English companies in Mexico in
1891. Another recruiter representing a British firm found over one thousand Chinese to travel from Hong Kong to British Columbia in 1884. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold*, 32.


57 Shukla and Tinsman note that “the aim of the Americas paradigm is not to declare historical differences – or the power of nation-states in creating these differences – irrelevant; nor does it simply compel us to see commonalities. Rather, we might think about how social formations such as colonization or migration are propelled by historical forces beyond the nation, as well as how they take their distinct shapes within transnational and transregional processes.” Tinsman and Shukla, “Editors’ Introduction,” *Radical History Review*, 5, 3.

58 Shukla and Tinsman note that “whether the Americas...is a fragmented or an integrated entity is a question that should be accorded some degree of flexibility.” Shukla and Tinsman, “Introduction,” *Our Americas*, 8, 17.


63 As Gary Okihiro reminds us, a sole focus on the "east-west filaments" of migration blinds us to the "messier" reality that "migrants moved east and west but also north and south." Gary Okihiro, "Turning Japanese Americans," in Kikumura-Yano, ed., Encyclopedia of Japanese Descendants in the Americas, 25. Scholars working on the Atlantic world also warn against reifying the east-west axis as opposed to a north-south one. Jorge Canizares Esguerra, "Some Caveats about the 'Atlantic' Paradigm," History Compass 3 (2005). See also McKeown, Chinese Migrant Networks, 69.


65 Board of Special Inquiry meeting in the Matter of the Application of Suchiat Singh, Angel Island Station, October 6, 1914, File 13831/4-1, Arrival Files, Port of San Francisco, RG 85, Records of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, National Archives, Pacific Region, San Bruno, CA. See also the cases of Mala Singh who went from the Punjab to Colon, Havana, Tampa, Havana, and Mexico before seeking entry in the U.S. (BSI October 6, 1914, File 13831/4-2); and Pana Singh, who also went to Colon, Havana, and Mexico (BSI Oct. 6, 1914, File 13831/4-3).

66 Chao Romero, The Chinese in Mexico.

67 Jensen, Passage from India, 121.