

Review Essay

OF PEOPLE, PLACE, AND PROCESS: THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION ON ASIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Rethinking the Global Ethnopolis: Chinatown, Japantown, and Manilatown in American Society. By Michel S. Laguerre. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000. xii + 199 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$59.95.

Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and Globalization. Edited by Evelyn Hu-DeHart. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999. xii + 220 pp. \$34.50.

The emergence of the Pacific Rim economy has dramatically altered the contexts in which transnationality is expressed and experienced. Both *Rethinking the Global Ethnopolis* and *Across the Pacific* seek to make sense of how Asian Americans have experienced these changes, without flattening the dynamic nature of the relationships that maintain and perpetuate the global connections linking these communities to the United States and Asian nations. Yet these books differ dramatically in analytical perspective: the former examines Asian American communities as spatial entities, and the latter focuses on the experiences of individuals who constitute Asian America.

In *Rethinking the Global Ethnopolis*, Michel S. Laguerre explores the development of urban immigrant enclaves in a global context. He examines how three ethnic communities in San Francisco—Chinatown, Japantown, and Manilatown—have experienced and maintained political, economic, as well as social relationships with their respective homelands. Laguerre seeks to identify how localized mechanisms of space create and sustain these global connections in relation to each other. Laguerre's first chapter lays out the theoretical framework for his study. The following two chapters examine how Chinatown and Japantown, respectively, developed as sites within which global economic and diplomatic relationships were spatially and racially articulated. Chapter four focuses on Manilatown as an example of globalized exclusion and marginality. The International House, on the edge of San Francisco's Chinatown and subject to the political and economic concerns of the dominant Chinese American community, becomes Laguerre's metaphor for the social, economic, and geographic marginalization of colonized subjects in local contexts. The fifth chap-

ter examines the reinvigoration of Japantown beginning in 1968, a result of Japan's growing economic power and the influx of Japanese corporate interests, city officials' attempts to revitalize Japantown as a site of commerce, and the leadership of Japanese Americans. His analysis in chapter six of the ethnic yellow pages and how they connect local markets to global producers highlights the dynamic and mutual reinforcement of local and global interests.

Most problematic throughout this study is Laguerre's static conception of Asian American ethnic identity. At one point, Laguerre maintains that Chinese Americans' celebration of Chinese New Year puts them "on par with mainland China cultural time and in temporal disharmony with American time" (p. 24). In presenting Chinatown as a site of "temporal and cultural disharmony" (apparently for Chinese American participants only), Laguerre simultaneously affirms the projection of European-American orientalism onto "othered" sites and continues the long tradition of perceiving Asian Americans as perpetual foreigners. Some of Laguerre's conclusions reflect too heavy an emphasis on the influence of global concerns within local contexts and not enough consideration of existing scholarship. He attributes the *deglobalization* of Japantown in Chapter two to the breaking off of global ties due to the actions of "the homeland," Japan. While the forced removal of Japanese Americans may have severed Japantown's formal and visible connections with Japan, the issei and nisei who were forcibly removed from that particular location did not necessarily cut off emotional connections. Historians Valerie Matsumoto and Brian Hayashi, among others, have shown that some Japanese Americans actually revived their ties to Japan, observing cultural traditions within the camps or even repatriation as a result of the betrayal by what they had hitherto considered their homeland, the United States.

Laguerre's sporadic attention to historical context and human agency will frustrate many historians. Historians of United States immigration and ethnic communities have long demonstrated the complex interactions maintained between homeland and the United States. In the process of mapping spaces of ethnicity and emphasizing the dynamic processes within, Laguerre ultimately displaces the inhabitants and their experiences of these spaces, obscuring what is at stake in globalization for individuals who constitute and give meaning to these communities. Nonetheless, although Laguerre's argument that the global and local are not separate entities is not new, his emphasis and elaboration on the mechanisms that link these entities may prove useful to historians examining how ethnic communities' formal interactions with other institutions are organized and structured. The introduction, a survey about the spatiality of ethnicity, and the first chapter are provocative, clearly defining key concepts and providing a spatial mapping of local/global relationships that some historians may wish to explore further in their own work. His brief discussion of the interethnic negotiations between Chinese Americans and Filipino Americans

and the spatial politics of the International House suggests the need for more research about the locations in which cooperation between marginalized and racialized communities is or is not possible.

In marked contrast to Laguerre's study, the essays in *Across the Pacific* locate community in individuals and interactions and specifically seek to address what is at stake in doing so. *Across the Pacific* is a product of the Asian Society's "Bridges with Asia: Asian Americans in the United States" project, co-sponsored by the Leadership Education for Asia Pacifics and the Asian American Federation of New York. The essays published here reflect the projects' purpose: to examine the effects of globalization and the growth of Asian American populations in the United States for Asian Americans from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Some of the essays tread over worn ground; yet when read in relation to other essays, their different perspective prove a provocative reminder that one cannot easily generalize "Asian America" from specific experiences and identities. While the volume does not explore in depth the experiences of all who bear the imprimatur of Asian America, the analyses set forth inspire vigorous exploration of implications for other groups in the Pacific Rim region, such as Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders, who have experienced globalization in very different historical and diasporic contexts.

The resulting mosaic effect, to employ contributor Luis H. Francia's terminology, strikingly demonstrates the complexity and instability of Asian America. This is due largely in part to the quality of the essays, which are well written and accessible. Arif Dirlik's cogent analysis of the dual orientation of Asian America in an updated version of "Asians on the Rim," continues to constitute a fundamental text for Asian American Studies. Dirlik persuasively argues that the specific location of Asian Americans may constitute a site of intervention within the processes of globalization. Neil Gotanda's summary of how immigration policy toward Asian Americans has been shaped by orientalism will not be new for historians of immigration. But his analysis of *People v. Hall* (1854) and how Chinese have been categorized differently over time is a significant contribution to understanding how Asian Americans have been racialized throughout United States history—as is his observation about how the ostensibly neutral term, "ethnicity," when applied to Asian Americans, actually perpetuates American orientalism.

The essays in this collection provide provocative counterpoint to each other. Lucie Cheng clearly outlines the complex ways in which the growth of China's economy has affected Chinese Americans. She observes that globalization has informed and expanded familiar discourses in significant ways, resulting in transnational racism and new myths about Chinese Americans as "model transnationals" within the global economy. Le Anh Tu Packard's essay directly compares the reliance of Vietnam and China on remittances and overseas investments and examines the multiple variables—politics, education, socioeco-

nomic status, and generation—that structure the involvement of overseas Vietnamese, particularly Vietnamese Americans, in Vietnam's economy.

Francia's closing essay about home and place in Asian Pacific American literature completes the volume on a wonderfully expansive yet challenging note. He reminds us that in order to understand how individuals relate to the United States and Asian countries, we must look to artists and writers, whose creative expressions often exceed categorization and chronology. Francia meditates on the many, ambivalent meanings of home for diverse members of Asian America and evokes the voices of some who participated in roundtable discussions for this project on globalization. After examining the notions of home and community in Asian American literature, Francia then shifts to a brief but focused discussion of how "home" has been imagined and reinvented specifically in Filipino American literature. Ironically, his fine concluding essay also highlights the absence of an essay that discusses the interactions, ideas, and critiques generated from the regional discussions between scholars and individuals from the local community.

In time this volume will serve as a touchstone of key issues confronting Asian America at this particular moment. Indeed, Editor Evelyn Hu-DeHart's fine introductory essay locates *Across the Pacific* in contemporary demographic changes and political developments, concluding with a discussion of President Clinton's nomination of Bill Lann Lee and Lee's eventual appointment as Acting Assistant Attorney General. The years since have brought forth new developments, including the United States government's "case" against Dr. Wen Ho Lee and the subsequent mobilization of several Asian American communities. This critical event suggests that the role of Asian Americans as participants in American society, and as conduits between Asia and the United States (whether perceived or actual), will continue to be contested in a variety of locations. This collection is an important reminder of what has been and what continues to be at stake.

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